COMRADES ON RIVER AND LAKE

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COMRADES ON RIVER AND LAKE

BY

RALPH VICTOR

AUTHOR OF "THE BOY SCOUTS SERIES," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY S. SCHNEIDER

New York
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THE COMRADES SERIES

By RALPH VICTOR

Ralph Victor is probably the best equipped writer of up-to-date boys' stories of the present day. He has traveled or lived in every land, has shot big game with Sears in India, has voyaged with Jack London, and was a war correspondent in Natal and Japan. The lure of life in the open has always been his, and his experiences have been thrilling and many.

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Comrades at School
Comrades at Winton Hall
Comrades on Winton Oval
Comrades on River and Lake
Comrades with the Winton Cadets

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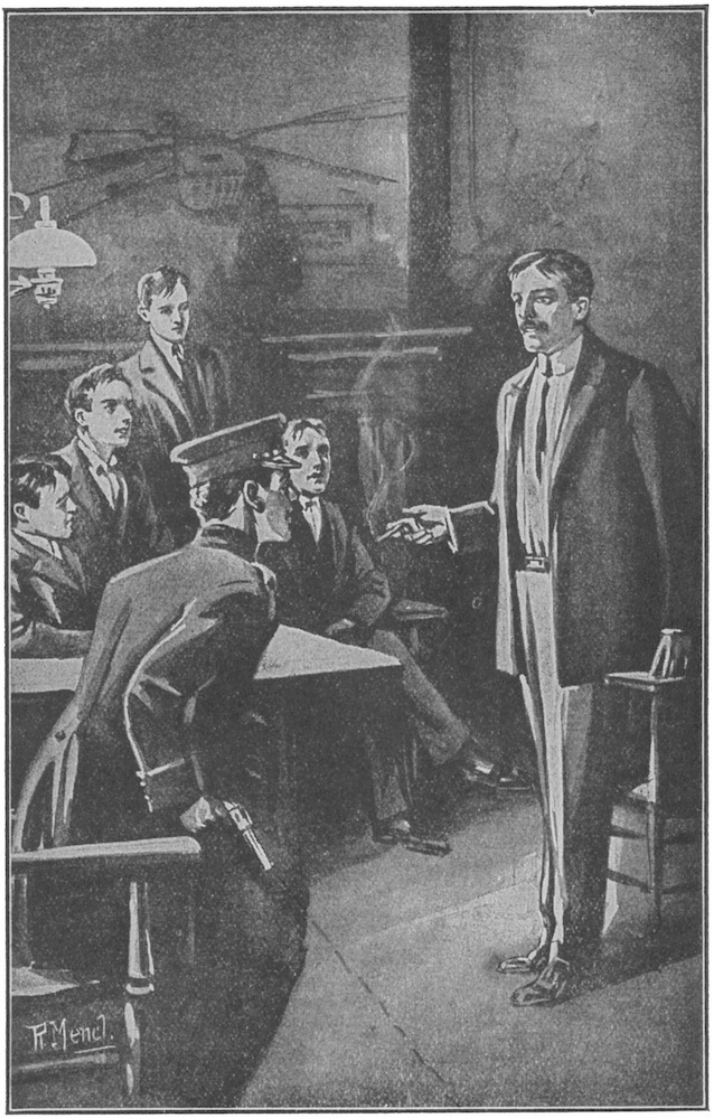

YOU WILL HAVE NO NEED FOR YOUR WEAPON.

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CHAPTER I—THE COMRADES LEAVE WINTON

Commencement days were coming, and soon the members of the first class would leave Winton Hall to return no more. They were a fine lot of boys, verging into manhood, and Commandant Cullum was proud of the fact that he had been instrumental in turning them out with a military training and good education to face the battle of life.

Vacation was but a week away when one afternoon Fleet Kenby dashed into the room occupied by his chums, Chot Duncan and Tom Pratt.

"Sh——" he cried.

"Well, what?" interrupted Chot.

"Yes; what?" echoed Tom.

"Well, I wanted to tell you fellows that——"

"Well, why don't you tell us?"

"Yes, don't get that old habit of cutting off your sentences just when you've aroused our curiosity."

"Give me a chance to——"

"Surely; take it!"

"Help yourself, old boy. If you see any chances lying around loose, absorb them."

"Now, see here," said Fleet, "you've tried this game on me several times and I'm getting tired of it."

"He's tired of our game," said Chot, with a glance at Tom.

"He's tired of our game," said Tom, returning Chot's look.

"Comes in here arousing our curiosity, then refuses to tell us what he's getting at."

"Then says he's tired of our game."

"I don't see any game."

"Neither do I."

"Well, I do," fumed Fleet. "I won't tell you now; I'll get out of here—that's what I'll do."

He made a dash for the door, but Tom blocked the passage.

"No, you don't," said he. "You're going to tell us what you came in to tell us, whether you want to tell us or not. Make up your mind to that."

Then Tom gave the fleshy lad a punch that sent him into Chot's arms, and Chot shoved him on to one of the beds in a sitting posture. Then the boys tipped Fleet over, one sat on his chest, the other on his feet, and despite his struggles, he was unable to do anything but writhe and twist.

"Nice way to treat a fellow," he cried. "Nice—"

"Whoa!" shouted Tom. "Now, tell us what you were going to."

"I refuse!"

"Then take this," said Chot, and plunging his fingers into Fleet's ribs, he tickled him until he fairly squealed.

"Oh, I'll tell—I'll tell!" cried Fleet. "You fellows think you're smart, don't you, but I'll get square for this."

"Oh, he's going to get square," said Chot. "He don't want anything out of that box we received from home to-day."

"No; express packages from Mortonville don't interest Fleet," Tom replied.

"Especially when they contain jam and cookies."

"Eh? What's that?" cried Fleet, trying to sit up. He stopped struggling.

"I was just speaking to Tom," Chot replied. "You and I, Tom, will eat raspberry jam, chocolate cake, currant jelly and brown bread."

"Oh, yum, yum!" cried Fleet. "Let me up this minute and I'll forget you ever sat on me."

"Shall we let him up?" asked Tom.

"May as well. I think he has learned his lesson. The next time he has something to tell us, he'll tell it, and not make us ask him over and over."

A moment later Fleet was on his feet.

"Where's the box?" he demanded, looking around.

"First, what are you going to tell us?"

"Aw—that can wait—I'm hungry."

"You're always hungry. Tell us."

"Well, the canoes have come," said Fleet. "I came in to tell you so Pod wouldn't hear."

"Pod's came with ours?"

"Yes; and mine came in from Mortonville. Funny, wasn't it, they all came on the same day?"

"Yes," said Chot "I ordered Pod's name put on his. I thought that would please him."

They were planning the way to tell Pod of his good fortune, when the little fellow came dashing into the room.

"What do you think?" he cried. "There's a package of freight down at the depot for me, and I don't even know what it is."

"That so?" said the Comrades in the same breath. No one cracked a smile and Pod continued:

"Will you fellows go down with me? There may be freight charges. If so, I shall want to borrow a little till I get my next allowance from Mr. Hounson."

"That'll be all right," said Chot. "We were going down to the depot, anyway. Fleet has ordered his canoe sent over from Mortonville and it should be here today."

The boys left the barracks together and walked toward the depot. Pod was scarcely able to conceal his curiosity. Never before had he received a package of any nature, and he wondered who could have sent him this.

When the boys entered the depot freight room a few moments later and saw the four canoes spread out before them, all were thrilled with delight.

There was Fleet's canoe from Mortonville, and three brand new ones that had come by freight from New York. And staring up from one of them in the blackest of black letters was the name "Pod Meelick."

"Say, fellows, am I dreaming?" cried Pod. "That—that surely isn't for me?"

"Must be—your name is on it," said Tom.

"But I never ordered anything like that—I—"

Seeing tears in the little lad's eyes, the Comrades burst into a roar of laughter, and Pod after a moment joined them, but his was a laugh bordering on the hysterical. It was several minutes before they got him calmed down, and told him that the canoe was a present from the Experience Club.

"And you mean—you mean that I am going on your canoe trip?" asked Pod, his eyes fairly bulging from their sockets.

"If you will do us the honor," said Chot.

"Oh, this is the best thing that has ever happened to me. I was just wondering what I would do during vacation. It would certainly have been lonesome in Bayville after the good times I've had."

They arranged to have the canoes taken to the Winton boat house, where they could be kept until the day after commencement, when the boys were to start on their summer trip up the river.

On their way back to the school the boys met Truem Wright, who came toward them along the sidewalk in front of the gym. Truem looked rather glum, they thought, and to show their good will each of the boys spoke courteously to him.

"I've been looking for you fellows," he surprised them by saying. "I—I——"

"Come along with us, Truem," said Chot, kindly, as the other hesitated.

"Well, if you don't mind," he said, and falling into step with them, walked on toward the barracks. "Vacation's pretty near," Truem went on after a moment, looking at the ground as he walked along, "and I hate to leave Winton without telling you boys what you've done for me."

"What we've done for you!" gasped Tom, with a queer look at his chums.

"Yes, what you've done for me. You've made me see myself as I was. I know now that I've been a cad—I knew it all along, but didn't have sense enough to admit it. You fellows have always been on the square with me, while I've tried to injure you on every occasion. I'm sorry for everything I've done. I'm tired of having the whole school down on me, and feeling that I have no friends among the cadets except certain ones whose friendship is not desirable. I don't ask you to take me into your set—I realize that would be asking too much—but I want to ask you right out to be my friends."

When Truem paused there was a moment of silence. This was broken by Pod.

"Do you include me in that, Truem?" he asked.

"Yes, kid, of course I do. I've treated you worse than anyone, because I picked on you for years back in Bayville. I'm sorry for that, too. I want to earn the regard and friendship of you all."

"You've earned that already, Truem, by expressing sorrow for what you've done," said Chot. "We've never had anything against you—in fact, we've always thought that you had the material in you for the making of a mighty nice fellow, and now that you've found it out yourself, no one will be readier to offer you friendship than we. Am I right, boys?"

"You bet you are," said Fleet.

"You've treated us rather meanly, Truem," said Tom, who was the most reluctant to give in. "But a man who can pitch a baseball game as well as you can't be very bad, so here's my hand, and I'm your friend as long as you want me to be."

Each of the boys shook hands with Truem. And as they did so they looked up to see Bert Creighton, Wilkes Davis, Dan Kirlicks and Randy Denton approaching. With the Comrades and Pod, these boys had become known at Winton as the inseparable eight.

"We've taken Truem into the fold, fellows," said Chot, in answer to the looks of surprise on their faces.

"I'm sorry for everything," said Truem. "I want your friendship. Can I have it?"

"You can have anything I've got if Chot Duncan says so," said Wilkes Davis, extending his hand. The other boys made remarks appropriate to the occasion,

then all tried to make Truem feel at home, and when they reached the barracks had succeeded in relieving him of the most of his embarrassment.

The boys soon began to get ready for their canoe trip. One of the first things they did was to arrange with Commandant Cullum to leave their ice yachts in the Winton boat house during the summer. The boat house was a commodious one, and the yachts were pulled up onto a platform in one end, and covered with pieces of tarpaulin.

"I wish I could take the voyage with you," said Truem Wright, one day, when the Comrades were busy laying in a small stock of provisions and otherwise equipping their canoes for the trip.

"You're welcome, if you can get a canoe," said Tom.

"It's too late for that now," said Truem. The tone in which he said it told plainly that he wished it wasn't.

"Well, I'll tell you what you do. By the middle of July we'll be in camp somewhere among the Thousand Islands. You'll be welcome there at any time, Truem. Shall we look for you?"

"Yes," responded the Bayville boy, a grateful look in his eyes. "I'll be there all right, and thank you."

"Come along and be one of us. The more the merrier."

Truem became the wonder of the other boys. To those who had known him as an enemy, the change was a revelation of what could happen when a boy realized that he was a cad and was anxious to make amends. With Truem making friends, and Roy Damon already on fairly intimate terms, the Comrades had but one enemy left—Dill Newman.

"And he's going to be against us during our entire course at Winton," said Tom, to which Chot and Fleet nodded a vigorous assent.

It was arranged before the boys parted from Bert Creighton that they should stay at least a week at his home on Lake George.

"And who knows," said Bert, "I may go on up the country with you."

The day after commencement the academy was deserted. All of the cadets were anxious to be off to their homes or on vacation trips, and finally only the Comrades and Pod were left. They had sent their trunks to their homes in Mortonville intending to go after them before the fall term opened.

Toward evening of the day after commencement, when the sun was getting ready to dip behind the hills on the west bank of the river, they pushed out into the stream, these four strong, sturdy fellows, on a journey that was to be full of surprising adventures.

CHAPTER II—THE FIRST NIGHT OUT

Pod had never paddled a canoe, but took to it naturally, his greatest fault being that he paddled too swiftly, and soon found his arms aching from the severe strain. Pod's canoe, like those of Chot and Tom, was of the Canadian open pattern, about sixteen feet in length and perhaps thirty inches wide. Cushions, filled with cork shavings, served as seats for the young canoeists, with their feet resting on a stretcher to give them a good brace. Then there was a cushioned back-rest against which each boy leaned with a sense of comfort and security. In this easy position, the work of paddling was done, and Pod began to taste the delights of canoeing, though the muscles across his abdomen, which were brought into play with every stroke, soon grew sore, and a realization forced itself upon him that they would be still sorer by morning.

The boys proceeded up the river at a very leisurely pace. There was no hurry, and Pod could not paddle rapidly anyway. The little fellow found great difficulty in keeping his canoe on a straight course with a single blade paddle, but after a little the knack of turning his blade at the end of the stroke, so as to keep in one direction came to him as it comes naturally to all who practice. He found that this turn of the paddle was done by the wrist, and that when once acquired it was a very simple matter to keep the bow headed the right way.

Fleet was the only boy in the party using a double-bladed paddle, but Fleet's canoe was twenty feet long, rather broad of beam, and capable of holding three persons. It was a much more formidable looking craft than those owned by the other boys. Fleet, however, had paddled the big canoe all his life, and the handling of the double blade was as easy for him as "rolling off a log."

Chot and Tom, too, were experts, but neither liked the double blade, preferring the lighter one, as well as a lighter craft.

In Fleet's canoe was stored most of the provisions, some cooking utensils and a small tent, intended to afford shelter during a storm, when the boys were

in camp and sleep was necessary. Each boy carried as his individual luggage a suit case containing a dark business suit, a couple of extra shirts, collars, a pair of patent leather shoes, and other articles necessary to make a natty appearance if the occasion arose. Ordinarily they would need only their rowing clothes, which consisted of a soft shirt, a pair of old trousers and light-soled tan shoes. Each boy carried a sweater for use when the nights were cool, or when he became overheated before landing.

The breeze had entirely died away by the time the canoes were a mile up the river, and the boys paddled easily along, keeping abreast of Pod, so that if by chance, his canoe "turned turtle," they would be on hand to render assistance.

The little fellow evidently suspected their purpose, for he said:

"Don't worry about me. I can swim, can't I?"

"Guess you can," said Chot, "and a ducking won't hurt you, but we're going to stay right with you anyway."

"I'm not going to upset. This is easy."

"Don't brag," said Fleet, as he pushed his paddle deep into the river and sent his big cruiser flying a length ahead, then slowed down till the other boys caught up with him. "Nobody ever went canoeing that didn't get upset, and you'll get yours sooner or later. Better in the old Hudson, too, than in the rapids of the St. Lawrence."

"And that's no gentle dream," said Tom, reverting to slang—a thing he seldom did.

"By the way, how long is it going to take us to reach the St Lawrence?" asked Pod.

"Don't know," said Chot. "We've no way of calculating. In the first place, we don't know how long we'll be at the Creighton's; in the second place, we're not going to hurry. This is a vacation and we're going to take things easy—or at least, I am."

"An easy time and plenty to eat—that's my motto," said Fleet, and immediately relapsed into verse:

There was a young fellow from Winton
Whose stomach he never was stintin';
    He'd eat day or night
    When dark or when light,
Oh, he was a regular spinton.

"A regular what?" cried Tom, as he stopped paddling for an instant and looked up in surprise.

"A 'spinton'," repeated Fleet, with a chuckle.

"What the dickens is that?"

"Don't you know what a spinton is?" asked Fleet.

"No; never heard of it."

"I'm surprised at your ignorance."

"Well, suppose you enlighten us," said Chot.

"Can't," replied Fleet. "Don't know what it is myself."

"Then why did you use it?"

"Because it rhymed with Winton," replied the fleshy lad, with a grin.

"By the way," said Pod, "speaking of jokes."

"Now, who said anything about jokes?" Fleet demanded.

"Well, you had your little fling, didn't you? Give me a chance. Speaking of jokes, what is the best time by the clock to tell a joke?"

"Oh, give it up," cried the other boys in unison.

"A joke is best appreciated when it strikes one," said the little fellow. He laughed so loudly that his paddle slipped and he came near capsizing. Then it was the turn of the others to laugh, and they made the water ring with their shouts.

"Wish he'd gone over on that one," said Fleet. "A little water might dampen his enthusiasm for making bad puns."

"The question now is, where are we going to spend the night?" said Tom.

The sun had long since disappeared behind the highlands, and evening was nearly upon them.

"Well, it's moonlight," said Chot. "I thought we'd keep on at a slow pace until Pod feels tired. Then we can go ashore, make a little camp, and snooze till morning in the open."

"Ah! that sounds good to me," said Fleet. "We'll also eat in the open."

"You'll have to open the 'eat' before you can eat in the open," said Pod.

"That'll do for you, youngster," said Fleet. "Jokes are barred until to-morrow."

"I'm down."

"And you'll be out too, if you don't watch how you're paddling," said Chot.

Pod was evidently about "all in," for his strokes were often wobbly, at which times he failed to control his canoe, and came near ramming one of the other boys.

"I'm good for another mile or so," said Pod. "I know every muscle in my body will ache to-morrow, so I want to keep limber as long as I can."

Finally the moon came out from behind a cloud and shed its radiance over the water, which appeared beautiful indeed in the soft yellow light. The boys were loath to leave the river, but Pod finally admitted that his arms were stiff and that he could not paddle much farther. As near as they could calculate they had covered eight miles, when Chot gave the order to swing in toward the shore.

A fine shady nook lay before them, where the green grass tempted them. All were hungry, so after pulling the canoes up on to the shore, the boys picked

them up and carried them up on the grassy knoll, where, with trees all around them, they made preparations to camp for the night.

What boy has not thrilled with pride when he slept in the open, often with no covering save the blue canopy, studded with stars, and a moon throwing its soft rays in his face? American boys love this life, and lose no opportunity to go camping, hunting and fishing. The Comrades were no exception to the rule—in fact, were never quite satisfied when forced to stay indoors.

As soon as the canoes were pulled high and dry on the knoll, Chot began to give orders, showing what an expert camper he was. Indeed his experience was considerable as the reader may learn from the previous books of this series which commenced with "Comrades in Camp" and "In New York." Then followed the stories of the South West "Ranch," "New Mexico" and "Great Divide." Later "School," "Winton Hall" and "Oval."

It had been decided that Chot should be the guiding spirit of this vacation; that all disputes were to be settled by him, and that he was to map out the route, say how long they should stay in a certain place—in fact, take the entire responsibility for creating the best of good times on the trip.

"Tom, you and Fleet throw out that tent, and while Pod and I are putting it up, get out a couple of cans of those cold beans, slice some cold ham, cut some bread, and put the water bottles where we can get hold of them. If any of you fellows feel like coffee we will build a fire and I'll make it for you."

"Yum, yum, coffee!" said Fleet. "That certainly listens well."

"I think so too," said Tom.

"Well, I believe I could drink a cup or so myself," Chot admitted.

Chot and Pod unrolled the tent, which was "V" shaped, with no sides, being intended merely for a roof. They stretched it between the trees, spread four blankets on the soft grass, took the cushions out of the canoes, and the sleeping quarters of the party were ready for occupancy.

Then each boy turned his attention to the preparing of the meal. The coffee was soon steaming in a kettle over the fire, kindled by Pod with some dry leaves and branches. Tom cut slices of rye bread, and spread tempting pieces of boiled ham between them. Fleet opened two cans of beans, and a jar of raspberry jam, and all was ready.

To say that the boys enjoyed their first meal would be but half expressing it. Fleet ate everything that was put before him and cried for more.

"These beans are the finest I've ever had," said he, though his mouth was so full that his words were hardly intelligible to his chums.

"Don't forget your table manners," said Tom. "Remember your mother taught you not to talk with your mouth full."

"He's not talking," said Pod. "He's only trying."

"Blub—blub—blub—I'll—I'll—gug—gug—gug—get—you—fuh—fuh—blub—blub——" spluttered Fleet.

"Swallow it!" cried Chot, "and don't do it again. We're running a respectable boarding house—not a pig pen."

Fleet swallowed as Chot told him, coughed violently, then seized one of the water bottles and drank long and hard.

"Leave the bottle, and we'll fill it again," said Tom.

With tears in his eyes Fleet waved his hand for them to desist. Pod jumped up and patted him on the back with no gentle force, which straightened the fleshy one out in a hurry.

"What do you think you're doing, anyway?" he demanded, glaring at his little comrade. "I'm no punching bag!"

"That so? Thought you were."

"Fleet has eaten enough to last him three days," said Chot. "Remember, fellows, he gets nothing but water during that time. There must be something left for the rest of us."

"Humph! I'd like to see you fellows keep me from eating!" snorted Fleet.

"Oh, you'd like to? Well, then, watch us."

It was ten o'clock when the boys had finished telling stories and discussing their trip. By that time all were sleepy, and Pod was beginning to feel lame all over.

"Gee! I hate to lie down, fellows," he said. "I know I won't be able to move in the morning."

Then the boys rolled up in their blankets, and fifteen minutes later were so deep in Slumberland that not even Fleet's snoring created an impression.

CHAPTER III—THE RACE

"Oh! Oh! Oh!"

A startled cry rang through the little camp shortly after daybreak the next morning.

Chot Duncan sprang up as if he had been shot, and Tom was not far behind him.

"What was that?" he cried.

They glanced around among the trees. A few birds were twittering in the branches, but otherwise the camp was apparently undisturbed.

"Sounds like someone in distress," said Tom.

"Eh? What's the matter, fellows?" cried Fleet, as he struggled up, rubbing his eyes.

"Heard a noise of some kind," said Chot. "Woke me up."

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" The cry came again in mournful tones, and from the blankets right at their feet. Looking down, the boys saw Pod, his face distorted apparently in great pain.

"What's the matter—are you sick?" Chot asked, kneeling beside his little comrade.

"Sick nothing!" growled Pod. "There isn't a muscle in my body that I can move. I don't know what I'm going to do, fellows. You'll have to go off and leave me."

"Well, won't that be too bad?" said Fleet. "Of course, we'll go and leave you. Won't give you anything to eat, either. We are cold, heartless creatures, Podsy, and we don't care what happens to you."

"Shut up with your sermons, Fleet Kenby. If you had my back and stomach, and arms and legs, and feet and——"

"And a few other things, why, then I'd be Pod Meelick, wouldn't I?" and Fleet grinned broadly.

"Stop laughing at me! This is no laughing matter! Lend a hand, Chot, and see if I can sit up."

Chot pulled the little fellow carefully into a sitting position, Pod letting off a groan or a shriek at every move.

"Oh, dear, I've counted so much on the delights of canoeing, fellows. I—I never thought I'd have to go through this—honest I didn't."

"Oh, be a man!" advised Fleet.

"Be one yourself!" was Pod's retort.

"We'll limber you up, youngster," said Chot.

"No, no! Keep away! What are you going to do with me?"

"Give you what you need—a bath and a rub down."

In a jiffy they had stripped Pod's clothes off and put on his swimming trunks, and with Pod between them, groaning at every step, Chot and Tom rushed down to the water's edge and plunged into the stream, followed more leisurely by Fleet.

Pod went under the water and came up puffing.

"Swimming will limber you up," said Tom, "and a good rub down will finish the business off."

Pod sent up a protest, but the water was deep where his chums had carried

him, and he was forced to exert himself to keep afloat. Gradually some of the lameness left him, as stiff muscles began to limber under the exercise, and after a ten minutes swim, while still lame he was able to scramble up on to the knoll with some degree of comfort. The boys had each brought a rough bath towel, and these were now brought into play and their skins rubbed until they shone with a ruddy glow. Perfect pictures of modern young athletes were these lads, as they stood there on the river bank, their fine muscular development showing to its full advantage, their breaths coming in the long, even way that denotes strong lungs.

"I surely feel better," said Pod. "Gee, when I woke up, though! I hate to think about it."

"Don't," said Fleet, laconically.

"I don't need your advice," said Pod. "What I need is a cup of coffee."

"We all need that," said Chot.

"And some bread and jam," said Fleet, smacking his lips.

"Who ever heard of bread and jam for breakfast?" asked Tom.

"I have," asserted Fleet.

"That's on the lunch or dinner bill of fare," said Pod.

"No; it's on the Fleet Kenby bill of fare," said that worthy, "and that means any time of the day or night the spirit moves me."

"Fleet's right," said Chot. "When it comes to eating, he moves both day and night. Why, I've known him to wake up in the night with a craving for pickles."

"Wish I had a pickle now," said Fleet.

"Oh, you do?" said Chot. "Well, there happens to be a bottle in your canoe. We'll open it."

"Why—er—never mind," said Fleet. "I—I think I'd rather save the pickles for later in the day."

"Bluffer!" cried Pod.

"You're the bluffer!" replied Fleet, and gave chase to the little fellow. He caught him about fifty yards from the knoll, then the two ran a foot race back to camp, Pod winning by a narrow margin.

"You can't run, you big porpoise," he taunted.

"Maybe not," was Fleet's reply, "but I can eat better now. I needed a little violent exercise."

The boys soon sat down to bread, cold beans and coffee—not a very substantial meal, but one eminently satisfactory when campers-out wake up hungry.

Fifteen minutes after the meal was over everything was packed into the canoes and the boys again shoved off into the river and headed up stream.

Pod continued to emit a few groans at intervals, but after a while paddling became easier, and the groans finally ceased. The boys set an easy pace for the little fellow, and the canoes turned bend after bend of the mighty river. Catskill

was soon passed, then Hudson on the opposite side, and soon Athens came into view. The boys soon rounded a big bend above Athens, and with the sun behind a cloud and all feeling in fine fettle, Fleet proposed a race.

"I'd hate to race you," said Pod.

"Why?"

"Because you take the sting of defeat too hard."

"Now, you're joking again. What do you other fellows say? Shall we race?"

"I'm willing," said Chot.

"And I," said Tom.

"Well, I hope you fellows will wait for me when you've finished—that's all I've got to say," said Pod.

"See that cat-boat moored to the wharf on the east shore?" asked Chot.

The boys nodded.

"We'll race till we're even with that, and the winner has to set them up at the first place we strike ice cream soda."

"The loser, you mean," said Fleet. "I don't want to win this race and set them up in the bargain."

"Well, the loser, then," said Chot, winking at Tom.

Pod, of course, was not in the race. He was too inexperienced as yet to push his canoe at such a rapid pace, even though he could have stood the strain.

Chot and Tom removed the cushions from their canoes, and fitted in a cross-piece, on which they sat with their feet braced well in under. Fleet, however, could not manage his double-bladed paddle in this fashion, and continued to sit on his cushion, his feet braced out in front of him.

Pod watched the boys line up, and when all were even gave the word to go. Three paddles dipped simultaneously into the water and the canoes shot away up the river at a rapid pace. Pod paddled leisurely along in their wake, they having agreed to wait until he came up with them.

Tom took the lead at the start, with Fleet second and Chot last. The cat-boat to which they were racing was perhaps a mile up stream.

Fleet was puffing from his exertion at the end of a half-mile, but had the satisfaction of knowing that he led his chums by a full length. The big double paddle fell on either side with rhythmic precision. But Fleet was doomed to disappointment, for when within a quarter of a mile of the finish, both Chot and Tom paddled rapidly past him, smiled into his face, and crossed the finish line neck and neck.

"That was a put up job," said Fleet. "But as long as the winner sets them up, I don't care."

"But the winner doesn't set them up," said Chot. "You remember we changed that to the loser at your suggestion."

"That's so; we did," Fleet reluctantly admitted, after a moment's thought. "In other words, little Fleetsy gets the warm end of the proposition all around."

"That's about the size of it," said Tom.

"Methinks I see a village ahead. Thinkest thou, Tomsy, couldst get ice cream sodas there?" asked Chot.

"Ay, ay, me lord," responded Tom, in a mock serious voice.

They paddled just enough to keep the canoes from drifting with the current down stream, and soon Pod caught up with them.

"Hope I get in on the ice cream soda," he said.

"Of course," said Chot. "Fleet has very kindly agreed to furnish all we can drink."

"I have not," said Fleet. "Once around, if you please. After that, someone else foots the bill."

Half an hour later they landed at a small village on the west bank, and were lucky enough to strike a combination soda fountain, drug store and post-office right on the river front. They chipped in a nickel apiece to get a boy to watch their canoes, then proceeded to drink ice cream soda to their hearts' content. It was nearly noon, so the boys concluded to buy some sandwiches for lunch, which would be eaten in the canoes farther up the river. Then they could provide a heavier meal at night. Fleet was reluctant to agree, believing that a juicy steak, some French fried potatoes and an omelet would set better on his stomach than a sandwich, but his chums argued him out of this.

"You can't paddle well on a full stomach," said Chot.

"If he can't paddle well on a full stomach, let him turn over on his back," said Pod, then dodged when Fleet made a pass at him.

They found a crowd of boys collected about the canoes, but the boy they had hired as guard was defiantly standing them off, and nothing had been touched. The boys chipped in and gave the little fellow an extra coin, and the urchin immediately decided that the canoeists were "bricks."

The boys pushed off into the stream again. The sun was rather warm now, and paddling was not any great delight, so they contented themselves with a slow, easy movement. This was kept up for the better part of two hours, when an incident occurred that relieved the monotony of the cruise.

The boys were hugging the west shore, hoping the sun would soon hurry behind the highlands, when upon turning a bend in the river, a catboat was seen in midstream, headed south. She was perhaps a quarter of a mile away from them, and they could easily make out the form of a young lad at the tiller. It was some time before he caught sight of the canoes, but when he did, he started up in amazement. They saw him lash the tiller and tip-toe to the door of the little cabin down which he looked in a furtive manner. Then he advanced to the side of the

boat and beckoned to the boys in the canoes.

"Wonder what that means?" said Fleet.

"He wants us to approach," said Chot. "Guess we'd better see what he wants."

So they headed their canoes out into the stream, and at the same instant the boy seized the tiller of the boat and brought her around to the wind so that she lay, her sails flapping idly, waiting for them to come up.

CHAPTER IV—THE FIGHT ON THE CATBOAT

"Looks like he's afraid of something," said Pod.

"Sure; this is the haunted sloop you've read about," Fleet responded.

"If you can make a sloop out of a catboat, you're a dandy, Fleet Kenby," said Pod. "Don't you know that a sloop has a bowsprit and a jib?"

Fleet was silent. He saw that his anxiety to bring in the "haunts," had led him into making a nautical error, so he subsided.

As the canoes approached the catboat, the lad at the tiller held his hand to his lips for silence, then pointed significantly toward the cabin.

"It may be a catboat, but it's haunted all right," said Fleet. "Don't you think we'd better clear out of this?"

"I don't see as this is half as scary as that hut I was shut up in on the east side of the river the night Kenton Karnes and his gang played kidnappers," said Pod.

"Well, let's see what this boy wants," said Chot. "He is evidently in great fear from someone in that cabin."

"Some*one*?" said Fleet. "You mean some*thing*!"

"I mean what I said."

"Push up alongside, fellows," said Tom, "and keep quiet unless the boy talks. He's trying to impress us to be silent."

The lad was still holding the nose of the boat to the wind, and the sail still flapped in the breeze.

The boys paddled up alongside, worked their way around to the stern, where again the lad held a finger to his lips. On the stern of the catboat were the words: "Nellie B. of Troy."

"What's the matter?" asked Chot in a low tone.

"Sh! Easy there," was the lad's reply. "Captain's drunk. Can you fellows take me off this blooming boat?"

"Why do you want to leave?"

"Because I don't belong here. He kidnapped me—shanghaied me, I guess you'd call it."

"He did?"

"Yes; my name is Ted Lanham. I live at Greenbush. He got me while I was in swimming. He's awful, fellows," and to prove the truth of his assertion, he pulled up his sleeve, showing several large black and blue spots on each of his arms.

"Why, that's a dirty shame!" cried Fleet "And you say this captain is in that cabin?"

"Sh! Yes; he's in there, but he's about half shot."

"Well, we'll get him for this!" said Fleet, whose sympathies had gone out to the unfortunate lad.

"You can't do it; he's six-foot tall and weighs over two hundred."

"Don't care if he weighs a million. There's enough of us to take care of him."

"I have a better plan," said Chot. "You say you live at Greenbush?"

"Yes."

"Well, we're headed in that direction. Your canoe will hold two, Fleet. Suppose we just take Ted off and leave the catboat to drift where she pleases."

Fleet did not like this idea. Of course, he wanted to take Ted in his canoe and carry him home; he had intended doing just that. But first, seeing the lad had been mistreated, he wanted to mete out some sort of punishment to the captain.

The plans of the boys were taken out of their hands in a most sudden manner. There was a bellow as if from a mad bull, and the next moment their startled gaze was focused upon the burly figure of a man in the cabin doorway. As the boy had said, he was a big man, and just now his eyes were inflamed, his hair tousled and his face as red as a beet, which made him look more ferocious than ever.

"What does this mean?" he roared. "Who stopped my boat?"

"I did," said Ted Lanham, a defiant note in his voice. Now that he had the Comrades and Pod to back him up, his courage began to return.

"Oh, ye did, did ye?" cried the captain. "You stopped my boat, did ye? Well, I'll learn ye how to interfere with my plans—I'll learn ye!"

"He's never been to school," piped Pod. "He said, I'll learn ye'," at which there was a laugh from the other boys.

Ted Lanham left the tiller and ran around the cabin, as the big captain stag-

gered toward him.

"Did you kidnap that boy?" asked Chot.

"Well, what if I did?" was the leering reply. "Who are you, that you interfere in my business?"

"The boy's business is our business, and we'll make your business our business until we get that boy out of your clutches."

"So ye're goin' to try an' take the boy, are ye? Well, just come ahead. I'm good for th' whole pack an' parcel of ye."

"Oh, you are?" cried Chot, his eyes blazing with anger. A peculiar smile played about his lips, which Tom and Fleet had grown to recognize as denoting great emotion. And now, as Chot sprang on to the deck of the catboat, yelling for Tom and Fleet to follow, the boys knew there would be "something doing."

"Do you want me?" asked Pod.

"No; you stay and watch the canoes. And you, Ted, climb over the stern into Fleet's canoe—that big one over there on the end."

By this time Tom and Fleet had followed Chot on to the deck of the catboat, and with a bellow of rage the big captain rushed toward them.

"Into the water with him!" cried Chot, "and keep out of the way of his fists. If he thinks he can beat the Experience Club, he's badly fooled."

"That he is," said Fleet.

Then the boys scattered so that, turn as he might, there was always a boy behind the captain. He realized that he was in a tight corner, but in his half-drunken rage he was blind to his best interests, so he rushed at Chot, who seemed to him to be the aggressor in the fight.

Chot easily evaded the rush, stepped lightly to one side, put out his foot, and the captain stumbled over it and sprawled his length on the deck. He arose, cursing, and rushed again. This time Tom was in his way. Tom, too, sidestepped and when the captain was even with him, gave him a blow in the stomach that doubled him up and sent him reeling on to the roof of the little cabin.

"My turn now!" cried Fleet, and before the captain could recover from Tom's blow, or realize what was about to happen, the fleshy lad had lifted him almost bodily, shoved him to the edge of the boat and toppled him into the river. At this there were shouts of delight from Pod and Ted.

The captain came up, puffing, and shaking the water out of his eyes after the fashion of an expert swimmer. The water had somewhat cooled his ambition for a fight, and he looked rather meek as he swam toward the side of the boat and started to scramble up. Here he met with a surprise, however. The Comrades blocked his way, and the moment he put a hand on the rail, it was loosened by one of the boys and the captain shoved back into the water.

"You're not goin' to let me drown, are ye?" he demanded.

"Oh, no—not yet, at least, but before you are allowed aboard the boat, we want to hear you say that you kidnapped Ted Lanham, and that you now relinquish all claim to his services," said Chot.

"I don't know what his name is, but I picked him up. I had to have someone to work my boat."

"While you could drink and sleep, eh?" demanded Tom. "A fine specimen of humanity, you are."

"Oh, let up, won't ye? I know when I've had enough. It was three against one, an' no man can fight such odds."

"Glad you realize it," said Fleet. "Do you relinquish all claim to his services?"

"See nothin' else to do," he sputtered, "lemme aboard. You go your way an' I'll go mine. But if I ever meet ye again, look out!"

"You'll never meet us again," said Chot.

"Not if we see you first, anyway," said Fleet.

They allowed him to scramble on deck, watching him warily, however, fearing treachery. But the captain was evidently sincere when he said that the odds were too great, and when the boys scrambled over the stern into their canoes, he was unlashing the tiller. Then the catboat swung around so that wind caught her sail, and moved off down the river. The captain sat in the stern, gazing stolidly ahead. Not once did he turn to look at the boys in the canoes, or even signify that he knew they were there. The matter was evidently a forgotten incident with him.

"Well, he's a cool one all right," said Fleet

"Too cool for me," said Ted Lanham, who was now sitting comfortably in the bow of Fleet's canoe, while Fleet had moved his cushions toward the stern to balance the craft.

"Do your folks live at Greenbush, Ted?" asked Chot, as the canoes moved off up the river.

"My mother," said the boy. "Guess she's wondering where I am."

"When did the kidnapping occur?"

"About three hours ago. I take a swim in the river every morning, and when the catboat came toward me, I thought the captain wanted to ask me some questions. So I got my clothes and climbed on board, at his request. Then he shut me in the cabin until he got out of sight of the village, when he took me out and licked me, and told me I belonged to him."

"What nerve!" cried Tom. "Sorry we didn't duck him again for that."

"May have a chance yet," said Fleet.

"I hope we've seen the last of him," said Chot.

"I'll be careful when I go swimmin' after this," said Ted. "Guess I was a little too far from shore."

"Well you had no means of knowing that he was going to kidnap you. Kid-

napping is an unusual occurrence on the old Hudson," said Tom.

The canoes were moving rapidly up stream now, and during the afternoon Ted's home was sighted. Greenbush was a pretty village on the east bank of the river, and the Comrades stayed over long enough to partake of the hospitality of Ted's mother. Mrs. Lanham received them warmly, after Ted had told of his experience, and thanked them for their efforts on behalf of her son.

She fixed a fine dinner for them, greatly to Fleet's delight. During the meal one of the boys happened to mention Winton, at which Mrs. Lanham became immediately interested.

"I hope to have money enough to send Ted to Winton next year," said she.

"We're all from Winton, and we'd like nothing better than to have Ted there in the fall," said Chot.

"Well, if that's where you fellows belong, it won't be my fault if I'm not there," said Ted.

It was nearly two o'clock when they took leave of Ted and his mother, and pushed off into the river again. They liked Ted and resolved to make his stay at Winton a pleasant one should he be so fortunate as to enter the academy at the beginning of the fall term.

It was but a short distance from Greenbush to Albany, and toward evening the young canoeists found themselves in the river off that city, with the great dome of the capital building shining against the western sky.

CHAPTER V—THE BOYS ARRIVE AT BERT'S

Strange to say, none of the Comrades had ever been to Albany before, and the sights of the capital were a great delight to them. Deciding that it would be time well spent, they went through the capitol building, Chot and Fleet going first, and returning to stay with the canoes while Tom and Pod made the trip.

A new stock of provisions were secured, most of which were put in Fleet's canoe, and late in the afternoon the boys pushed out from among the steamers

and small craft, and threading their way through the river traffic, soon left Albany behind.

Some two hours later, just as dusk was falling, the lights of another city loomed up on the east shore.

"Troy," said Chot. "At least I suppose it is. I've never been there, but I know it isn't far from Albany."

"Gee, but there's a lot of cities up this way," said Pod, to whom such sights were novel. The little fellow had never stirred from Bayville except to neighboring towns, until he entered Winton the previous fall, and the trip up the Hudson was like a glimpse into fairyland for him. It pleased the Comrades immensely to see Pod enjoying himself. They were doubly glad now that they had "chipped in" and bought him a canoe.

The boys having eaten heartily in Albany, it was decided not to stop at Troy. Darkness was falling, the moon would soon be up, and as each boy was feeling fine, it was thought best to paddle along by moonlight until a suitable camping place was found.

So they continued at a leisurely pace past the city, and were soon in the open river above. The Hudson was growing narrower now, but this detracted not at all from its beauty, and the boys were loath to leave off paddling, but the need of sleep finally led them to seek a camping place.

It was some time before they found a spot that looked nice enough to spend the night in. Past Cohoes, Lansingburg and Waterford they went, and finally turned in toward a pretty grove on the east bank. Here, under the rays of the moon, they again made their camp, much in the fashion they had on a previous occasion.

The canoes were pulled high and dry on the bank and carried well back among the trees. Then the tent was stretched, and soon the Comrades were ready for bed. They could not withstand the temptation to stop and talk a while, however, and as a fitting accompaniment to their conversation, Chot and Fleet prepared a lunch, which was washed down with cold water from a nearby spring.

"Speaking of lawyers," said Pod, "do you know——?"

"Now, who said anything about lawyers?" demanded Fleet.

"Well, speaking of them, anyway, what would you say if you had occasion to do business with one and he charged only a nominal fee?"

"I should say," replied Fleet, "that it was quite fee-nominal."

So surprised was Pod at having Fleet answer one of his jokes, that for a moment he stared, open-mouthed, at his comrade. Fleet, pleased at his ready answer, was laughing heartily, and after a moment Chot and Tom joined in, much to Pod's chagrin.

"Think you're smart, don't you, Fleet Kenby?" cried the little fellow.

"A little too smart for you that time, anyway."

"Well, since you're so smart to-night, I suppose you know what the patient said when he went to consult two dentists who were brothers, and it took both of them to pull his tooth?"

"No; I am forced frankly and unreservedly to admit, Mr. Meelick, that I do not know what the patient said," returned Fleet, in a tone that exasperated Pod.

"Nor I," said Chot.

"What did the patient say, Pod?" Tom demanded.

"He said, 'Just see what two brothers can do when they pull together'," and Pod commenced to chuckle.

But none of the others cracked a smile. Of course, they all understood the joke, but simply to irritate Pod, they pretended that they did not.

"I say, he said, 'Just see what two brothers can do when they pull together'," repeated Pod. "Don't you see—pull together—two of them?"

"'Pull together—two of them'," echoed Tom, looking inquiringly at Chot.

"Yes; there were evidently two brothers," said Chot. "Don't you understand, Tom? They were dentists. They didn't want to pull the tooth for this patient, but——"

"Oh, you don't catch it yet," said Pod. He was exasperated as he always was when one of his jokes fell flat. "This patient had a sense of humor——"

"Oh, I see it now," said Fleet. "The patient had a sense of humor, fellows, so he went to have his tooth pulled. That's the funniest thing I ever heard," and Fleet laughed uproariously.

"No; you haven't caught the point yet, Fleet," said Chot. "The point to this joke lies in the fact that the patient went to see two dentists at one time. He stood there watching them for a moment, you understand, trying to decide which one he wanted to pull his tooth. Each of the dentists wanted to pull the tooth, but the patient only wanted one of the dentists to pull the tooth. Well, can't you see—er—that is, to say——"

"I understand perfectly," said Tom. "The joke is that both of the dentists wanted to pull the same tooth. That was funny, wasn't it?"

"I don't believe you've quite got it yet," said Fleet. "You see when this patient entered the dentist's office——"

There is no knowing how long this might have continued, had not Pod arose with a snort of disgust and announced his intention of going to bed.

Pod's anger did not last long, however, and in the morning he had forgotten that there ever was such a thing as a joke about two dentists.

The boys were astir before sun-up. A fire was kindled and a pot of coffee made, and well satisfied so far as the inner boy was concerned, the boys pushed their canoes out in the stream just as Old Sol came peeping over the hills to the

east.

"I want to make a good day of it," said Chot. "We should be in Sandy Hill by to-morrow noon."

"Sandy Hill?" inquired Fleet. "Where is that, and why do you say we should be there?"

"Because there is where we leave the Hudson."

"Do you mean that we have a portage so soon?"

"Not exactly a portage because we do not carry our canoes. But we take the train at Sandy Point for Lake George Station on the southern end of Lake George, which is only eight miles from Bert Creighton's home near Kattskill Bay."

"Do you suppose Bert is looking for us so soon?"

"I told him we'd be only a few days—not more than a week, at the most—getting to his place."

"I didn't realize we'd covered that much ground."

"That much water, you mean," said Pod.

"Very well; I stand corrected."

Chot's predictions came pretty near working out, too, as the other boys found. A steady gait, with occasional periods of rest, sent them up the river to within eight miles of Fort Edward by ten o'clock that night. That was the biggest day's paddling since they had left Winton, and each of the boys was glad to roll up in his blanket and sleep after the usual bed time lunch.

They were up with the sun again, however, and after a plunge in the river, felt greatly refreshed and in fine fettle for another day's work.

Just as the siren of a factory on the west shore was announcing the arrival of the noon hour, the Comrades sighted Sandy Point, and ten minutes later had made a landing, arranged with a boy to guard their canoes, and were eating ravenously in a neighboring restaurant, where new milk and juicy steaks, the latter smothered in onions and cream potatoes, made them glad they were able for a time to forsake the river.

The meal over, the Comrades went to the depot and inquired about the next train for Lake George Station. They were informed by the agent that two-thirty was the time. The station was thirteen miles distant, and the run was made in about thirty minutes. The train was what is known in railroad circles as a "local," and stopped at all stations en route.

The railroad was not far from the river, and the Comrades had no trouble in carrying their canoes to the depot, where they had them checked, after first purchasing tickets for Lake George Station.

It was three o'clock when they picked up the canoes at the latter place and started for the shore of the lake. They did not stop in the village, as they were anxious to reach Bert's home before dark. A light breeze was ruffling the surface

of the lake when they embarked, but not enough to in any way disturb the canoes. With the wind at their backs, and hugging the east shore, the boys paddled rapidly away from Lake George Station. Three coves, or arms, of the lake, jut into the land in this vicinity, all within the space of eight miles. On the third of these was the village of Kattskill Bay, near where Bert Creighton lived with his parents.

Chot had the topography of the region well in mind from Bert's description, and from a map of Lake George and vicinity which he carried in his pocket, and toward evening he turned his canoe sharply to the right, as a stretch of water, which he felt must be the right cove, lay before them.

"This looks good to me," said Fleet, as the green meadows and comfortable-looking groves came into sight. "I don't wonder that Bert Creighton thinks he lives in the only place in the world."

"Look at the cows grazing on the hillside yonder," said Pod. "Hope they belong to Bert. That means fresh milk and butter, buttermilk and eggs, and——"

"Whoa!" cried Tom. "If you get eggs from those cows, you'll be doing something miraculous, Podsy."

"Oh, I didn't mean that," said Pod. "But where there are cows there are usually chickens, and eggs seem to go naturally with milk and butter."

"Don't discuss such subjects," said Fleet. "You make me hungry."

"Oh, you're always hungry—couldn't fill you up if they poured a perpetual stream of food down your throat," said Pod.

"Nothing like a good appetite," said Fleet. "If I look at these hills and dales much longer, I shall break forth into verse."

"Then don't look at them," advised Chot.

"I believe I feel a poem coming on."

"Well, put on the safety valve. Hello! Who's that? As I live, it's Bert Creighton!"

Sure enough, there was Bert, standing at the end of a little wharf that jutted out into the lake. He was yelling and waving his hat at them. Stretching behind him was a pretty meadow, and farther on a hill on which sat a farmhouse—Bert's home, the Comrades felt.

It was with thankful hearts that they turned their canoes in toward the wharf and grasped the hand of their old chum again.

"Gee! but I'm glad to see you fellows up here," said Bert. "Been looking for you since yesterday," and he led the way up a broad path toward the house.

CHAPTER VI—GETTING READY FOR THE GAME

The welcome extended the Comrades and Pod by Bert's parents was cordial in every sense of the word. The big farm was placed at their disposal, and Mrs. Creighton exerted herself to the utmost to provide delicacies that would tempt them, and in this she succeeded beyond her fondest expectations.

It pleased her to see these healthy young fellows eat, and Fleet, especially, was an unending source of delight to her, for when he was not praising her cooking, he was smacking his lips in the keenest enjoyment. By that, it is not meant that Fleet's table manners were bad; on the contrary, no boy ever paid more attention to the conventions of eating than he, except when camping in the woods, or on some other informal occasion, with only his chums to see him.

The boys slept soundly the first night and arose in the morning to plunge with Bert into the waters of Lake George. Then, after a rub-down that set the blood tingling all through their bodies, they sat down to wheat cakes, maple syrup and coffee, with generous dishes of strawberries and cream on the side.

"You fellows may as well limber up your arms," said Bert when breakfast was over, and the boys had spent half an hour talking over old times.

"That's so; Bert promised us a game of baseball," said Chot. "How about it, Bert?"

"It's all arranged. Cleverdale has a mighty good team for a country village, and they have agreed to come down to-morrow for a game in our big pasture."

"Well, isn't that clever of Cleverdale?" said Pod.

"Here! Don't spring any more of those," warned Bert. "I don't believe I could stand the pressure."

"Oh, Pod's been misbehaving all the way up," said Tom.

"Well, I had plenty of company," responded the little fellow. "Fleet Kenby fairly disgraced us all, and I failed to observe where any of the other members of our party earned any special bouquets for deportment."

"Listen at the language!" cried Fleet, as he put his hands on Pod's head and began an examination, much after the fashion of a phrenologist. "Yes; here's where it came from. This, gentlemen, is the bump of knowledge, considerably enlarged though colliding with its neighbor, the bump of conceit. The latter bump, which, you will observe, lies right above the ear, is bounded on the north by a wisp of hair, on the south by——"

But Pod had stood all he intended to stand, and diving suddenly between Fleet's legs, he toppled the fleshy one over on the grass, he, himself, escaping a fall by an agile spring.

Fleet sat where he had fallen, grinning. He enjoyed his innocent battles with Pod and was not at all angry when, occasionally, his little chum got the better of him.

Bert brought forth a ball and bat, as well as several gloves and mitts.

"I have a collection," said he, by way of explanation.

"We don't need the gloves; we brought our own, and nothing feels so comfortable on your hand as your own glove," said Chot. Then the boys proceeded to get their gloves out of the canoes. Fleet fished out his big first baseman's mitt, and began to limber himself by striking with his bare fist in the hollow spot, which was deep from the constant pounding of the balls.

"But, I say, Bert," Fleet asked, "you say we are to play Cleverdale tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"How? There are only five of us. Have they a full nine?"

"Yes, and we will have our full nine players also. There will be five young fellows here in the morning to stay all day with us—boys who live in the neighborhood of Kattskill Bay, and who are anxious to acquire Cleverdale's scalp. You see, there's not enough of us here to make a team, so we are availing ourselves of the opportunity to secure some real college talent, and expect to win from Cleverdale very handily."

"Oh, you flatterer!" cried Pod. "Real college talent! Is that us?" he demanded turning on Fleet.

"Well, it's me, anyway," was Fleet's reply. "You don't think I play first base for Winton for nothing, do you, youngster? And don't forget that you are Terrible Podsy, king of the shortstops."

"And you are Flippant Fleetsy, the bum first baseman," Pod replied, dodging behind Chot, as Fleet made a move toward him.

The boys went out into the big pasture where they found a fine diamond, with the grass close-cropped by the constant feeding of the cows, perfectly level and worn smooth on the base lines. The boys uttered exclamations of delight.

"There's nothing like a good ground, free from rough spots," said Tom. "But

I had no idea we'd find a ground up here as smooth as this."

"Well, I'm beginning to find lots of wonderful things around here," said Fleet. "Take those pancakes Mrs. Creighton made this morning, for instance."

The other boys laughed as Fleet smacked his lips.

"What I am figuring on now," Fleet continued, "is how to get word to her to have another batch to-morrow morning."

"I'll tell her," said Bert, amused at Fleet's perpetual desire for food.

"Thought maybe you would if I mentioned it," said Fleet.

The boys took turns batting flies and grounders, Chot taking most of the burden because he was to pitch, and needed very little practice on the diamond. So he batted to Pod and Bert, who threw the ball to Fleet at first. Fleet, in turn, threw to Tom who stood at the plate, his big catcher's mitt on his hand. Tom caught the balls and tossed them to Chot, who would then bat them out again.

Every now and then Pod would dash swiftly to second, when Fleet was throwing the ball home, and Tom would seize it and shoot it down to the second cushion with all his old-time speed. Pod would then seize the sphere and put it on an imaginary runner, and throw to Fleet again to catch an imaginary runner at that bag.

"This seems like old times," said Fleet. "There are many outdoor games, but after all there is only one."

"There are many, and yet there's only one. There's a riddle for you—figure it out!" cried Pod.

After a while, breathing heavily from their exertions, for the morning was warm, Pod, Bert and Fleet decided to stop. Then Chot took the ball and threw for fifteen minutes to Tom, speeding them in as his arm grew more limber, until the ball became but a mere flash in the atmosphere as it passed from one chum to the other.

Then, practice over, the boys stretched themselves out in the shade of a big oak tree for an hour of solid comfort.

"If Dan, Randy and Wilkes were here, I'd be perfectly happy," said Bert. "But I suppose it's impossible for all of us to be together the whole year round."

"And I wouldn't mind in the least if Truem Wright were here," said Chot, which remark occasioned some surprise among his comrades.

"Well, I've forgotten the mean things he did," said Tom. "But I haven't taken him to my heart sufficiently to wish he was here at this moment."

"I look at it this way," said Chot. "Truem was a cad of the first water, as many boys are who have well-to-do parents, and have wanted for nothing during the time they are growing up to go to college. Unless such a boy has a strong grip on himself he'll grow supercilious, and may be led into doing spiteful things just as Truem was. We gave Truem what he deserved when we were in Bayville on

our vacation that summer, and he took a strong dislike to us from that moment. But after he came to Winton his eyes gradually opened, and he saw that we were trying to act squarely with everyone. Then a longing for real companionship came into his heart, as it will sooner or later come to every boy who goes to the bad, and he finally mustered up the courage to tell us that he wanted us to be his friends. And I tell you, fellows, it takes a lot of courage to ask a thing like that of the boys who have been always on the other side, and whom you have been fighting for months. But Truem did it, and now, I say we should have enough interest in his future welfare to lead him along the right path, take him into our set, if need be, and show him that we are glad from the bottom of our hearts to help him. Those are my sentiments."

There had been not the slightest interruption while Chot was speaking. Each listener had a serious look on his face, for he saw that Chot was in deadly earnest, and when he had finished, each boy felt that their chum was right. Truem had earned the right to their friendship and they should see that he never regretted it.

Bert was the first to speak.

"You are right, Chot, and Truem will have no warmer friend than I next term," he said.

The others hastened to assure Chot that they felt the same way, and the matter was dropped.

"By the way, Chot," said Bert, suddenly, winking at the other boys, "what ever became of Lucy Pendleton?"

"Why do you ask me?" queried Chot.

"Well—er—because I thought you were somewhat interested in her."

"Oh, no," drawled Fleet. "He isn't interested. I'll never forget the time, just the same, that he let Tom and I do all the work on our telephone line so that he could talk to her."

"Correct," said Tom, "but Chot would never admit it."

"But all joking aside," said Bert, "where is Lucy to spend the summer?"

"After a short visit at Mortonville, she will stay with her aunt, Mrs. Dashworth, at Stockdale," said Chot.

"I thought she had a father somewhere," said Pod.

The Comrades exchanged glances. Lucy did have a father, but he was not all a man should be, as the Comrades had every reason to know. During the winter he had come to Mrs. Dashworth's and sent for Chot to ask him to raise enough money to do the preliminary work on a Colorado mining claim which he had staked out. This Chot had done for Lucy's sake, forcing Pendleton to give Lucy a fifth interest, and a fifth interest each to Tom and himself. Pendleton was now in the west, trying to interest capital in the venture. Chot and Tom had little faith in

the claim's panning out well, but for Lucy's sake they had given Luther Pendleton a chance.

Chot had been more inclined to do this than Tom, who had taken an instinctive dislike to Pendleton when Pendleton had been bookkeeper at the brass works in Mortonville, and had, upon the death of Tom's father, exacted the sum of one thousand dollars from Tom and his mother, alleging that Mr. Pratt had made away with that much of the company's funds. Tom knew positively that his father had been innocent of the charge, for by accident a phonograph had recorded part of a conversation between Mr. Pratt and someone connected with the brass works, in Tom's attic room, but Mr. Pratt had been taken suddenly ill and was unable to reveal the name of the man who was trying to do him injury.

These things now recurred to the Comrades, and especially to Tom, who sat for an instant gazing gloomily out over the lake.

"Someone wronged my father—someone wronged him, and I'm going to find him yet, if only to let my mother know that not the slightest stain rested on my father's character. I must—I will find this man!" and Tom gritted his teeth, as he silently made this resolve.

His reverie was broken by the sound of the horn calling them to dinner, and springing up they all raced for the house, Fleet leading the entire distance, as a vision of fried eggs, new potatoes and apple pie appeared before his eyes.

CHAPTER VII—THE BASEBALL GAME

THE CREIGHTONS.

Meelick, ss
Creighton, 2b
Kenby, 1b
Pratt, c
Duncan, p

Jones, rf
Day, 3b
Lorrens, lf
Smeed, cf

CLEVERDALE.

King, lf
Cotton, 2b
Gregg, c
Biddle, rf
Corker, 3b
Strange, ss
Burton, cf
Windle, 1b
Johnson, p

Umpire: Mr. Creighton

When the teams lined up for the fray in the big Creighton pasture the next day, that is the way the line-up looked. Bert's father, who was a baseball enthusiast, and noted for his squareness in all things, was chosen umpire by the mutual consent of both sides, after a short conference between Bert and Waldy Biddle, the captain of the Cleverdale team.

Jones, Day, Lorrens and Smeed, who filled out the Creighton team, were players of no mean merit, but a little light on batting, so Bert put them at the lower end of the batting list, preferring to bring as much of the old Winton talent into play at the start as possible.

Both teams showed up well in the preliminary practice, and the spectators from Cleverdale and the surrounding farming country settled down with an expectant hush, as Mr. Creighton cried:

"Play ball!"

Bert had won the toss for innings, and took the field, sending Chot into the box, himself going to second, from which point of vantage he could watch each move of the game.

King, the Cleverdale left fielder, was the first to face Chot, and he appeared to be confident, for he smiled in a way that made Chot resolve to teach him a few things about pitched balls.

Chot sent over a wide out, which started straight toward King, then curved over the plate. The batter let it pass and Mr. Creighton called a strike.

This made King smile all the harder. But when Chot sent over a hard, straight ball, fairly sizzling with speed, and he struck at it and missed, he did not appear so confident.

Chot smiled as he noted the look of amazement on King's face, and with a quick movement he sent over one of his best drops. King then showed his inexperience with such balls by striking fully a foot over it. He retired, rather crestfallen, giving place to Cotton.

Cotton appeared fully as confident as the boy who had preceded him, and after twice fouling the ball, he knocked a little pop-up which Day gathered in off third without trouble.

Gregg tried to bunt, but missed and a strike was called. He then tried to hit it out, and in this, also, he was unsuccessful, for Chot sent over some of his balls, and the Cleverdale player had struck out before he realized it.

The farming contingent, which was rooting for the Creightons, cheered as Bert's team came in from the field.

"Even in the rural districts the great national game has a strong hold," said Tom.

"Yes; it seems that the entire country goes out of its way to do homage to baseball and those who play it," said Chot.

Pod felt natural in being the first to bat, for he had led the Winton batting list during the entire series of games with Winton's closest rival, Jackson College. The series had been won by Winton, three games out of five, and Pod, as well as the Comrades had contributed not a little toward the victories.

Pod pleased Bert, as well as the other boys by knocking a single between first and second. The ball was recovered by Captain Biddle, and Johnson turned to find Bert facing him at the plate.

Not to be outdone by Pod, Bert sent a hot one down the third base line, taking two bases and advancing Pod to third. The little fellow was about to try for the plate, when Chot stopped him at the third cushion.

"Don't be greedy," Chot said. "We'll try and get you home somehow."

Pod grinned.

"This suits me," he said.

Fleet was at bat, and after letting two go by, he sent a long fly into center field, which Burton caught after a long run. Immediately Pod dashed for the plate, and though the fielder made a good throw to Cotton, who, in turn, sent the ball to Gregg, he was safe by a good margin.

Tom went out on a grounder to Corker, who threw to first. Then Chot pounded out a double into right, Bert scoring the second run for his team.

Then Jones struck out, retiring the side.

The Cleverdale boys tried hard to score in the first of the second, but Biddle

went out on a grounder to Pod, Corker struck out, and Strange flied out to Lorrens.

The Creightons did not fare much better in the last half of the inning. Day reached first on balls, but was thrown out trying to pilfer second. Lorrens knocked a pretty single into left, but Smeed flied out to Burton, and Pod ended the inning by sending a hot liner straight into the hands of Windle.

Burton led off for Cleverdale in the first of the third, and succeeded in working Chot for a base on balls. Windle, who followed, put him on second with a single to center.

Johnson struck out, proving very weak at the bat, as the majority of pitchers do.

King bunted down the third base line, filling the bases, and a hum of excitement ran through the ranks of the Cleverdale rooters. Three men on bases and only one out! It looked good for their team.

But they had never seen Chot Duncan work himself out of a tight place, so they were treated to a little exhibition of real baseball that made them open their eyes in wonder, and which made Bert Creighton, from his position on second, chuckle with delight. Bert was furnishing a real baseball game for his friends on Lake George, and he wanted them to have occasion to remember the boys from Winton Hall.

Chot eyed Cotton calmly, then signals not noticeable to anyone passed between he and Tom. It was the same old battery of Duncan and Pratt using their brains when the occasion demanded sensational work, and they had never yet failed to pull off a play planned in this manner.

Chot raised his arm in a leisurely way, and to all appearances the ball was to be an easy one; but when it flashed over the plate it went with the speed of the wind, and Cotton let it pass because he had no time to strike at it. The umpire called a strike.

Tom took his time about returning the ball to the diamond, and when he raised his arm to throw he snapped it down to Fleet with such speed that Fleet caught King several feet off the bag and put the ball on him in a hurry. This was an old trick worked on many occasions by the Comrades, and especially with teams which were not familiar with their mode of playing.

Two men were out, King walking back among the other Cleverdale players with an expression of disgust on his face.

The Cleverdale coachers were yelling loudly now trying to rattle Chot, and Burton was told to take a big lead toward home. Two were out and he must run on anything. It never occurred to the Cleverdale boys that the Comrades would try the same trick two times in succession, but on the next ball thrown Tom sent it like a shot to Day, at third and the latter made a pretty catch and put Burton out before the Cleverdale man realized what had happened.

The Creighton rooters fairly made the welkin ring with their cheers as Bert's team came in for their turn at bat.

Then the Creightons got busy. Bert, himself, led off for his team, and the last of the third will probably be long remembered by the players of the Cleverdale team. Bert smashed out a corking single to right.

Fleet, who followed, hit the ball a resounding crack and put it into the farther end of the pasture, far over Burton's head. It was a clean home run, and he circled the bases, sending Bert in before him.

Tom followed this with a two-bagger over King's head in left, and Chot hit the ball between right and center for another homer, sending Tom in ahead of him.

Then Johnson was taken out of the box and another boy, Nibbins, substituted. Nibbins threw over two or three to warm up, then faced Jones in a confident manner.

Jones, however, singled to right, and easily made first. Day was given a base on balls, Lorrens advanced both runners with a bunt down the first base line and the bases were full.

Smeed was up, and Nibbins, in trying to fool him with some swift ins, hit him lightly on the shoulder, forcing Jones in from third.

"Oh, my, what a picnic!" cried someone.

Then Pod knocked a single over first and Day and Lorrens scored.

Then to show the uncertainty of baseball, with Bert, Fleet and Tom up in succession, and no one out, Bert popped up a little fly which Nibbins caught, Fleet struck out in trying to slam out another extra base hit, and Tom knocked a weak grounder to Strange who threw him out at first.

The Creightons had scored seven runs and the score now stood 9 to 0 in their favor.

Far from being discouraged, the Cleverdale boys started the fourth inning as if they meant to tie the score in a hurry.

"All together, now, boys," cried Captain Biddle, "No game is lost till the last man is out in the ninth, so let's get busy."

But Chot Duncan was in too good form to allow the Cleverdale boys anything he did not see fit to, and he retired Cotton, Gregg and Biddle in one two three order, striking out Gregg and causing Cotton and Biddle to knock little grounders that were easily handled.

Chot led off for Winton in the last of the fourth. He knocked a pretty single, but succeeded only in reaching first that inning, for Jones flied out to Cotton, Day went out on a little fly to Nibbins and Lorrens struck out.

"What's the use?" queried Fleet, as he went out to his position in the first of the fifth. "Too hot to play baseball. I'd rather lie down under that old oak again.

It's hard to keep awake out here."

But he was awakened in a manner that put him on his mettle a moment later, for Corker struck the first ball Chot offered him and sent it on a bee line for the Creighton first baseman. Fleet had hardly been prepared for such a swift one, and he was late in jumping into the air, with the result that the ball touched his fingers, bounded off and went shooting down the right foul line. Jones chased it, but was unable to keep Corker from taking second.

Then Chot issued a pass to Strange, who grinned as he trotted down to first.

Burton did not look dangerous, but he bunted unexpectedly and Day, who tried to field the ball, fumbled it until it was too late for a throw. The bases were full with no one out.

"Watch them now, boys," cried Captain Biddle. "We know the tricks of the Creighton battery, and they'll never be able to work us again. Here's where we start to even things."

Which shows that they did not know the reputation of the Winton boys, and when Bert Creighton saw Tom deliberately wink at Chot, he knew that his chums had something up their sleeves and he waited in anxious expectancy to see just what it was.

CHAPTER VIII—THE GAME END

"The bases full and no one out!"

How many times has this cry shaken the nerves of the home rooter, as he saw his favorite players apparently in a hole they could not get out of without allowing one or more scores?

The friends of Bert Creighton and the other Kattskill Bay boys, while confident that the boys from Winton possessed the ability to help Bert win a victory, saw no loop-hole for shutting off the scores of the Cleverdale team in the fifth inning.

Remembering the two plays of the previous inning, the Cleverdale runners were hugging the bases, watching eagle-eyed for a throw from either Chot or

Tom. But the Winton battery proceeded to ignore the runners apparently.

Never had Windle batted at such an array of curves, mixed with swift balls and slow balls, as Chot Duncan served up to him during the next two minutes. The best he succeeded in doing was a foul tip which counted as a strike. With two strikes and no balls, he felt that he must hit the next one, but he did not figure on the drop, and again Chot sent his man along the strike-out route with his old reliable "fooler."

"Hit it out, Johnson!" cried Biddle. "A single will do."

"Johnson isn't making singles to-day," muttered Fleet. Then he grinned in delight as Chot threw a swift in, and the Cleverdale pitcher struck and missed. Another in the same place brought a second effort from Johnson, this also unsuccessful. Then the drop again, and Johnson retired as Mr. Creighton cried:

"Batter out!"

King was facing Chot now. He was reputed to be the best and quickest man in getting to first of any of the Cleverdale players, and he had resolved to show Chot that he could not strike him out again.

Chot cast his eye around the bases now. The runners were still hugging close. Chot was tempted to let King hit it, and trust to the Creighton fielders to get under the ball, but decided not to take a chance. Then, suddenly, he resorted to a style of throwing that he had not used in a long time—the underhand method. Chot had mastered this style long since, and could throw ins and outs with equal facility, and with as much speed as he ordinarily used for his other delivery.

King was disconcerted. He had never seen balls come whizzing over the plate in just this fashion. One strike, two strikes, were called and King began to be alive to the fact that he was apt to go the way the other batters had. Then suddenly Chot swung his arm over his shoulder and the reliable drop went shooting into Tom's mitt. King had hit at it and missed. Chot had struck out three men with the bases full.

"Oh, there are different methods of doing it," said Fleet, as he carelessly threw his mitt down near the base and walked in with the other Creighton players.

Smeed tried to get a hit for his side in the last of the fifth, and succeeded in sending a grounder to short. He was thrown out. Pod beat out a bunt but Bert surprised his friends by striking out. Fleet lifted a long fly into center, but Burton was playing deep and had little trouble getting under it.

Cleverdale again looked dangerous in the sixth, but again Chot and Tom, with Bert's assistance, cut off two runs when it seemed that the rival side must score.

Tom led off for Winton. Getting a ball where he wanted it after a strike and two balls had been called, he sent the sphere into deep right for three bases.

Chot struck the first ball pitched, and it went sailing between left and center,

out into the tall grass, where it was recovered some minutes later by the combined efforts of Burton and King! By the time the ball was thrown into the diamond, Chot had made a complete circle of the bases, sending Tom in ahead of him.

"Gee whiz! Eleven to nothing," said Fleet. "This game should have a poem."

"Not if we know ourselves!" cried Pod. "Let well enough alone. Don't bring down a hoodoo by turning loose any bad verse."

"Speaking of women," said Pod. "Did——"

"Who said anything about women?" Fleet demanded.

"Well, speaking of them, anyway, I know a school teacher who is so industrious that she is knitting all the time while she is teaching."

"Get out!" cried Fleet. "How can a school teacher knit and teach at the same time?"

"This teacher is knitting her eyebrows," said Pod, and dodged out of the way as Fleet made a dash for him. The Kattskill Bay boys laughed heartily at Pod's joke, which caused Fleet to remark:

"If you heard as many of them as we do, they wouldn't be funny."

"And if you heard as many bad verses as we do," said Pod, "you'd hate to travel in the company we travel in."

Fleet glared at him but said nothing, and a moment later, when Jones went out on a grounder to Corker, all interest became centered on the game.

Day flied out to Burton and Lorrens went out on a grounder, Strange to Windle.

Believing the seventh might be their lucky inning, the Cleverdale boys tried their utmost to score. The cry with them grew to be not, "Can we win?" but "Can we save ourselves from a shut-out?" Captain Biddle thought they could. Chot Duncan had resolved they shouldn't.

Strange was up for Cleverdale, and he knocked a single into right. No man had yet tried to steal a base on Tom, so Strange resolved to be the one to humiliate Bert Creighton's catcher. He was a swift runner, and felt that with a good lead he could make it. With the first ball Chot threw, he was off for second. Burton, knowing that Strange was going to attempt a steal, struck wildly at the ball to bother Tom.

But Tom was always at his best in situations of this kind, and with apparently no effort he shot the ball down to Bert, who put it on Strange when he was ten feet from the bag, Tom having anticipated the runner and thrown that far to the right, where Bert stood just a foot or so back of the base line.

A cheer went up from the Creighton rooters. This was the sort of playing they liked best to see.

Burton knocked a little fly back of second which Pod caught easily.

Windle hit the ball hard, but it was a liner straight to Bert, and the second

baseman smothered it in his glove, retiring the side.

The seventh was over and still Cleverdale had not made a score.

"Why don't you give them just one?" cried someone, as Bert and his players came in for their turn at bat.

"Give 'em one and they'll want a dozen," replied Bert, smiling. "A coat of whitewash will look good on Cleverdale."

The Creightons then proceeded to add another run to their already large list. Smeed secured a base on balls. Pod struck out, but Bert advanced his center fielder to second with a sacrifice, and Smeed came home a moment later on Fleet's long hit between first and second. Tom flied out to King, and the side was out.

Johnson struck out as usual, Chot giving him no opportunity to hit the ball. He seemed afraid to stand up to the plate, and a batter who is timid is easy prey for the opposing pitcher.

King pounded out a two-bagger, Smeed getting the ball in center in time to hold him on the second bag.

Cotton bunted safely, King taking third, and Gregg advanced to the plate. Gregg was the Cleverdale slugger. He did not always hit the ball, but when he did it usually went somewhere. He stood in his favorite position to wait for a suitable ball, knowing that one of his long hits now would score both King and Cotton.

A moment later he was walking slowly down to first. Chot had deliberately given him his base on balls.

"I don't like that," he said, glaring at Chot.

"Sorry," responded the latter and made ready to throw to Captain Biddle, who, with the bases full and no one out, was confident that he could save his side from a whitewash, at least.

He struck viciously at the first ball thrown, but missed. He tried again, but Chot was using all the speed he had, resolved that the Cleverdale team should be whitewashed until the end. Two strikes were called on Biddle. Then came one just where he wanted it—or, so it seemed to him. He struck with all his might, and succeeded in tipping the ball. Not enough to deflect it from its course however, and it landed in Tom's mitt and Biddle was out.

Corker knocked a long fly into left, but Lorrens had no difficulty in getting under it, and the first of the eighth was over.

Winton went out in one, two, three order, in the last half of the inning, and the ninth opened with Strange at the bat. Cleverdale was resolved to have another try at scoring.

Strange succeeded in bunting safely, Tom getting the ball, but fumbling it until it was too late to throw to Fleet.

Burton waited and got his base on balls. Chot had sent over a couple of teasers and the umpire had ruled them balls, and Chot realized when too late that

he had made a mistake.

Two men on bases and no one out.

Windle was up, a look of determination on his face.

Then Chot commenced to burn them over. Such dazzling speed had never been seen in the Creighton pasture before. Mr. Creighton nearly forgot that he was umpiring in his amazement at the way Chot sent the balls whizzing over the plate.

A strike was called, then Windle struck at two more; but he might as well have tried to hit a bullet from a gun. He was called out on strikes.

Johnson surprised everyone by hitting the ball, but it went straight into Pod's hands, forcing Strange at third.

Everyone was on tip-toe with excitement as King drove the sphere into deep right for what seemed to be an extra-base hit. Burton, who was on second, raced for home with all his speed. Then Jones, who had been running back to get under the ball, saw that it was going over his head, and with a supreme effort shot into the air and caught the sphere with one hand. It was a sensational catch and received a round of cheers.

The game was over and the score stood: Creightons 12, Cleverdale 0.

The little animosities of the game were soon forgotten when it was learned that Mrs. Creighton had prepared a fine supper on the lawn back of the farmhouse, and the boys hurriedly gathered up their paraphernalia and went in that direction, while the crowd began to disperse.

The supper was an enjoyable one in every sense of the word, and songs and jokes were heard on all sides. Pod was allowed to turn loose a few of his latest, and he kept the table in a roar for the better part of the time.

Finally the Cleverdale boys took their leave, after shaking hands warmly with the boys from Winton, and inviting them to the Lake George country again the following summer.

"When," said Captain Biddle, smiling, "we'll try and make things more interesting for you."

CHAPTER IX—ON LAKE CHAMPLAIN

The next few days were happy ones for the boys from Winton, for the Creightons extended every hospitality that lay in their power. Riding horseback, going to the village in the spring wagon, hoeing corn and potatoes in the big garden back of the farm house, and the consuming of practically all the good things Mrs. Creighton put before them—especially by Fleet—served to make the time pass quickly.

One day, however, Chot gave notice that the journey was to be resumed the following morning, and the other boys with a sigh of regret, packed their belongings into the canoes and made ready to shove off into the lake at daybreak.

Greatly to their satisfaction Bert, after a short talk with his parents, announced his intention of going with them.

"That's fine," said Chot. "I've been hating to ask you because I was sure you were going to say you could not go."

So Bert's canoe was packed with a few things he most desired to carry, and placed in the water at the edge of the lake with the others before the boys went to bed that night.

When they arose, the sun was just peeping over the hill-top. They found that Mrs. Creighton had prepared one of her fine breakfasts of wheat cakes and maple syrup, with coffee and pure cream on the side, and the way they ate and the comments they made were very gratifying to her. She would miss their smiling faces and good appetites, she told them, as they were leaving.

"There is nothing so inspiring to the woman who prepares a meal as to have people eat it and know they enjoy it," said she.

The boys assured her that they had never had better things to eat in their lives, and after a hearty handshake all around, with Mr. and Mrs. Creighton standing on the little wharf, waving their hands, the five canoes pushed off and went skimming over the water to the northward.

"We'll keep along the east shore for a while," said Bert, "until we see how much of a breeze is coming up to-day. It gets pretty rough out in the middle there sometimes—rough for canoes, I mean."

They accepted his advice, knowing that he was familiar with every corner of the lake, and paddled easily for nothing was to be gained by hurrying.

Bert showed himself to be a fine canoeist. They all admired his long, graceful stroke with the single blade. His canoe was of the Canadian pattern, much like those owned by Chot, Tom and Pod, and of about the same size.

"Reminds me of the Spanish Armada, going into battle," said Fleet, as he cast his eye over the little squadron. "Eh, how about it, Admiral Duncan?"

"Ay, ay, Christopher Columbus. Shift your lee bow until you sight Hurricane Island, then hold a straight course for Cape Cod light. Don't give up the ship until we have met the enemy and they are ours. Reply by wireless if you receive my message distinctly."

"Message received distinctly," said Fleet "England expects every man to do his duty."

"Speaking of England," said Bert, "when we are going up Lake Champlain I'll show you where McDonough fought his famous battle in 1814."

"That will be interesting," said Tom. "I have always admired the way he riddled the English fleet. I don't believe there has ever been a naval battle in which greater wisdom was displayed by the commanding officers than in the battle of Plattsburg Bay."

"As far as battles go," said Chot, "this is a famous locality. All during the colonial days and even in the War of the Revolution, this was a familiar stamping ground for the soldiers of America, England and France, to say nothing of the Indians."

"That's so. Fort Ticonderoga must be around here somewhere," said Pod.

"I doubt if we shall see old Ticonderoga," said Bert. "It will be some miles below us when we enter Lake Champlain, and we can not visit it without losing considerable time."

"And we don't want to do that," said Fleet. "I'm anxious to get into the old St Lawrence."

"You won't be so anxious by the time you're shooting some of the rapids," said Tom. "I'm not so sure but I shall be in favor of a portage around several spots in that stream."

"Humph! I'm not afraid," said Fleet.

"Nor am I," Tom replied. "But I don't see any use in risking our necks, and maybe turning our trip into a funeral, when we can be happy by being careful."

"Well, that's a matter we can decide when we come to it," said Chot.

In the early afternoon the boys pulled in to the shore and ate lunch in a

shady nook. Many good things had been placed in the canoes by Mrs. Creighton, and the boys felt especially grateful for them now that they were leaving the Creighton farm behind, and would soon have only the memory of the things they had eaten there.

"Apple butter!" cried Fleet, as he unscrewed the lid to a glass jar, and took a generous spoonful of the contents. "Yum, yum! I tell you, fellows, this is what I call living high."

The others were too busy eating to reply, and Fleet munched his bread and apple butter in silence.

Lunch over, they pushed out into lake again. They were in the narrower portion now, which stretched ahead for some twenty miles. The breeze was from the south and very light, and the boys did not hesitate to paddle out into the lake where, with the bows still headed northward, they skimmed along at a rapid pace. The sun soon went behind a cloud, and as evening approached and the air grew cooler, the boys increased their pace.

They were well up the lake by dark, with the prospects of being in Lake Champlain by noon of the following day.

Camp was made, as usual, under a clump of trees, the tent was stretched, and a small fire was kindled for coffee. The fire was allowed to burn until bed time, because the moon was not up and the darkness was intense. It was nine o'clock when they sought their blankets, feeling tired from the exertions of the day. Ten minutes later they were all asleep.

Shortly after midnight, they were awakened by what seemed an unearthly noise. Chot was the first to realize that the silence of the camp had been invaded by some sort of a man or beast, and sitting up he rubbed his eyes and stared about him. The moon was just showing signs of rising, and a pale glow suffused the lake and shore, but in the deep shadows of the trees little could be seen, as yet, and as Chot continued to gaze about him, the trees and bushes began to assume fantastic shapes.

"Wonder if I've been dreaming?" he muttered. "Guess I'll wake the other fellows, and we'll have a look around."

Bert and Fleet were already awake, and Tom and Pod were quickly aroused and advised to keep still.

"What's the matter?" whispered Pod, who began to tremble, at being aroused from his sleep in such a manner.

"There's something or somebody in the camp," Chot replied, in a low tone. "Don't say a word, fellows. Just sit here and watch. In ten minutes the moon will be over that hill and shining right through the trees. Then we can see what's going on."

Huddled in a little group, Pod's heart beating a tattoo, the boys waited for

the appearance of Old Luna. They were not afraid, these fellows, but no one wants to go after an unseen enemy in the dark, and they were merely taking the best means to discover the intruder, and to handle the situation in the best way that suggested itself.

Gradually the world grew lighter, and finally the moon poked its golden rim over the distant hill, then farther and farther until the light finally burst over the land with a brilliant radiance.

Then, suddenly, Chot burst into a roar of laughter.

"What's the matter?" cried the others.

"Matter?" he replied. "Can't you see what startled me?" and following the direction of his finger, they saw half a dozen cows grazing under trees.

"One of those animals must have bellowed in my ear."

Relieved to find that there was nothing near but cows, the other boys laughed too.

"Maybe you scared the cow, Chot—who knows?" cried Fleet.

Then, as if to set their fears entirely at rest, one of the cows sent a plaintive "Mooh-h-h!" echoing through the trees.

"Oh, pshaw! I'm sorry I woke up now," said Fleet, and with a yawn he dropped back into his blanket.

The others followed more leisurely, and soon all were slumbering peacefully again. This time nothing disturbed them, until they were awakened at dawn by the twittering of birds in the trees overhead.

Coffee, rolls, and jam served as their breakfast and at seven o'clock they pushed off into the lake again.

Two hours later they entered the little stream that connects Lake George with Lake Champlain. Paddling became easier here and they made good time, and shortly after eleven sighted the larger lake. Lake Champlain was in the form of a bay where they entered it, and seeing a town on the right, they concluded to stop there for dinner. The town proved to be Delano, a pretty little village, where they were able to secure most everything that appealed to them in the way of food.

Well satisfied, but not inclined to labor very heavily, they again pushed off, wielding their paddles slowly as they moved up the lake.

Toward evening they came to where two points of land jutted out into the water, one from either side. Between them was a narrow passage of water, while beyond, the lake was five or six miles wide, and apparently wider still in the distance.

"This is Crown Point on our left and Chimney Point on our right," said Bert. "I came up here once in a small sail boat. I think this will be a fine place to camp to-night."

The boys agreeing, they pitched their tents on the Crown Point side and began to prepare the evening meal. While they were at work, they heard voices nearby and looked up to see two strange-looking men approaching along the shore of the lake. It was rapidly growing dusk, and the features of the strangers could not be distinguished. They had apparently not seen the boys, for they were discussing something in low tones.

Then one of the men placed a finger to his lips and the talking ceased. They were looking straight toward the camp, the fire having attracted their attention. The next instant both men were off like the wind, crashing through the underbrush and after a moment the darkness swallowed them up.

The boys stood with open mouths staring after them.

"Well, what do you make of that?" asked Bert.

"Don't know what to make of it," said Chot. "But I know one thing—there's something suspicious going on around here."

And the others agreed.

CHAPTER X—A SURPRISE IN THE DARK

"Hope we don't run into any counterfeiters," said Pod. "I've heard that such people frequented lonely spots on the lake shore."

"I'm afraid they are criminals of some sort," said Chot. "Otherwise they would not be afraid of a bunch of young fellows like us."

"Wonder where they went?"

"They started north, but may be going west or south by this time."

They continued to discuss the strange incident during the meal. The thought that suspicious characters might be in the neighborhood did not disturb their appetites, however, and when at last they arose from their improvised lunch table, not a vestige of food remained.

Fleet, as usual, had carried on the brunt of the eating, and he grunted uncomfortably as he arose and signified his intention of going to bed.

"Don't go to bed on a full stomach," advised Chot.

"I'm not; I'm going to bed on my back."

"Oh, pshaw! I cracked that one myself," said Pod.

"No; not that one."

"Well, one just like it."

"I didn't hear it," said Fleet.

"Yes, you did hear it, and you've got to stop telling my jokes and palming them off for new ones."

"Everyone knows that's not new. I read that in one of the comic papers when I was a little boy."

"You're not much more than that now," sniffed Pod.

"Go ahead," said Fleet, good-naturedly. "You can't make me mad after a meal like that."

"Stop quarreling, you fellows," said Chot. "I read that joke myself three years ago."

"You see!" said Fleet, triumphantly.

"No, I don't see," said Pod. "The first time I ever heard it was when I cracked it."

"Say, fellows, let's have a few songs," suggested Bert.

"What! on a full stomach," protested Fleet.

"Not on a full stomach—on a bunch of notes," said Pod, and burst into a roar of laughter. "Ha, ha ha! Got you that time, all right. You steal my joke from me, then I give it back to you with interest."

"I don't see the point," said Fleet.

"No; but you'll feel it if you sit down on that snake, there."

"Wow!" cried Fleet, who was nearly in a sitting posture. He sprang into the air with more speed than grace. "Snake!" he cried looking about him. "Where's any snake?"

"In your boots," said Pod, and again the laugh was on Fleet.

Then the boys hummed a few airs to get in tune with each other, and finally broke forth with a volume of song that rolled out across the water and probably carried to the other shore, for sound carries well on a still night:

Here's to good old Winton, drink her down,
Drink her down!
Oh, here's to good old Winton, drink her down!
She is merry, she's sublime,
We are here from every clime,
And we're having a good time,
Drink her down!

Fleet had an excellent bass voice, and the boys followed the usual custom of singing the song down to the three lines which rhyme. Then they would pause and Fleet would come in with some new lines out of his inexhaustible supply, and the other boys would join in again on the last "Drink her down!" For instance:

Here's to good old Winton, drink her down,
Drink her down!
Oh, here's to good old Winton, drink her down!

Then Fleet alone:

We are on a trip, you know,
But we're moving mighty slow,
Get up, boys, let 'er go——

Then all together:

Drink her down!

This was kept up indefinitely, for Fleet would improvise rhymes for his three lines as long as the boys cared to sing. These rhymes were not always sensible, but were often very funny, and it was in the hope that he would sing the funny ones, that the boys encouraged him.

After the "Winton" song, the boys drifted off into "Old Folks At Home," "Old Black Joe," "Nellie Gray," and several other old melodies, and when the last note had died away over the lake, there was a pause. Then from Fleet:

Jim-uh Jackson was a great-uh big-uh fat coon!
He-uh didn't want nothin' but a chunk of the moon;
He-uh——

Here the others broke in, and forced him to desist. Fleet's craze for "coon" songs was a sore spot with them. Not to be outdone now, however, Fleet went off into:

By the old mill stream I'm waiting,
Rosie, dear-r-r-r-r!

Fleet held the last note as long as possible, and the boys waited patiently until he had finished.

"Fleet's a fine singer of illustrated songs," said Chot. "He's missed his voca-

tion. Instead of going to school, he should be at work in a moving picture theatre."

"Aw, cut that out!" growled Fleet. "I never sing a pretty ballad but what you tell me that."

"It's because we're trying to rid you of your depraved taste for silly songs," said Tom.

"Depraved taste!" snorted Fleet. "I'd like to know why you're always telling me that?"

"Because," said Tom, "those songs are composed merely to suit the popular taste. Many of them bring their publishers fabulous sums, but they are mighty poor contributions to our American music, though I'll admit that they have their place."

"Tom is right," said Chot "Lots of songs are written in half an hour. A music publisher gets an idea. He rings up his lyric writer and tells him about it. The lyric writer gets busy, and probably dashes off two or three verses in ten minutes, much the same way as you compose yours, Fleet. Then the composer takes the words, and very often within the same space of time he has fitted a melody to them. Then, of course, the orchestration has to be made, the song is given to the printers, a lurid cover is designed, and the first thing you know it's in the music stores, selling at the rate of many thousand copies a day."

"Oh, well," said Fleet, "your sermons are very pretty, but I don't see why I should not sing what I please, when I please."

Fleet always made some such reply as this, but invariably he did not sing any more ballads or "coon" songs for some time.

"By the way," said Pod, "speaking of birds——"

"Who said anything about birds?" demanded Fleet.

"Well, speaking of them, anyway, did it ever occur to you that they were especially noted for their courage?"

"They're not," said Fleet "Most of them are cowards."

"Well," said Pod, "they die game."

"They die ga——oh, gee! that's a bad one. I'm going to bed on that," cried Fleet.

"Glad I found something to send you to bed on besides a full stomach," laughed Pod.

Fleet did not reply, but began making preparations to lie down under the tent. The other boys gradually arose, stretched themselves and also prepared to retire.

While they were fixing their blankets, there was a sudden low cry from Chot.

"Sh! Listen!"

For a few seconds there was a profound silence.

Then the sound of voices, came to their ears from up the lake, mingled with the muffled splash of oars. Someone was approaching camp in a rowboat; that was evident, though nothing could be seen. It was very dark now, the camp fire having almost entirely died away. True, the stars were out, and the boys could see their reflection in the waters of the lake, but beyond imagining that they could see a dark splotch on the surface of the water, they could make but nothing.

As the boys stood listening, the talking ceased, but every few seconds the soft splash of an oar, or the clank of an oar-lock came to them from the lake.

"Someone is trying to surprise us," said Chot, in a low whisper, as the others gathered around him. "It may be the men whom we saw earlier in the evening. They may be figuring on holding us up."

"Say, they wouldn't get much," whispered Pod.

"Sh! Let's gather a big bunch of that dry grass we used to kindle our fire with, and have it handy where we can touch a match to it. Then we'll wait for these men to land, and see what their intentions are."

Pod agreed to get the grass ready and he crept silently off to the right, where he gathered quite a pile of it. He also put a lot of dry boughs and twigs on the hay, so that once a fire was started it would continue for some time after the hay had been consumed. Then he rejoined the others.

The low murmur of voices could again be heard, followed, by the splashing sound as before. The boat was evidently approaching slowly.

"They're wondering if we're asleep," whispered Chot. "And of course, we are, to all intents and purposes."

Not a sound was made in the little camp, and gradually the noise from the lake grew louder. Soon the splash of the oars could be plainly heard, and then the sound of voices speaking in whispered tones. What was said could not be made out for they did not speak loud enough to have awakened even a light sleeper.

Then the sound of a boat being drawn partly upon the beach came to them, and a low voice said:

"Make her fast, Hank!"

There was a low-muttered response to this, which the boys did not catch, and then by lying close to the ground, they could make out the figures of two men against the starlit sky. The figures moved slowly up the slight incline leading from the edge of the lake to the Comrades' camp. So softly did they come that save for the occasional snapping of a twig, not a sound was made.

"It's a good thing we were not asleep," thought Chot. "They'd have caught us napping, sure."

"I wonder where they are, Dave?" said a low voice, after a moment "I'm sure this is the spot."

"Sure, it's the spot. Didn't we hear 'em singing down this way not fifteen

minutes ago?"

"That's right."

"Guess they must 'a' thought there wasn't no one about."

"Guess they must have. Say! what was that?"

"I didn't hear anything."

It was Pod, who, at Chot's order, was crawling again toward the pile of dry hay and sticks, with the command to touch them off the minute Chot whistled twice.

The men were nearly upon them now, still moving cautiously, when suddenly one of them made out the dim outlines of the tent.

"I see something white," he said in a low, startled tone.

"Yes; I see it, too," was the reply. "Get ready to rush 'em, Hank!"

The words were hardly uttered when Chot gave the signal to Pod. There was the crack of a match, the hay ignited quickly, and as the flames sprang up, throwing a yellow glare over the camp, the boys sprang to their feet, prepared to grapple with the intruders. But imagine their surprise when they found themselves gazing into the barrels of four revolvers, and a stentorian voice cried out:

"Hands up! By thunder, we've got you now!"

CHAPTER XI—A LIVELY EVENING

For a moment none of the boys said a word. Then Chot burst into a laugh, believing the best thing to do was to "jolly" the men.

"Yes; you've got us all right, but I think some explanations are in order."

"You're right, young fellow," said one of the men. "Explanations are in order, and you're going to make 'em."

"What is there to explain?"

"Lots o' things."

"For instance?"

"Never mind for instance. Hank, line this bunch up over yonder, then put some more trash on that fire so it won't go out I think we've got the fellows we

want, all right."

Hank jammed two immense pistols into his belt and did as his companion ordered. Hank was a young man, probably twenty years old, heavy set, with the appearance of having always lived off the fat of the land. The other—Dave, he had been called by Hank—was long and lean with a scraggly mustache, a man of at least forty.

"These are not the men we saw earlier in the evening," said Chot in a low tone to the other boys.

"No; I don't see the slightest similarity in their appearance," Tom replied.

"This don't appear to be a hold up, either," said Bert. "This man Dave talks like he thinks we're criminals of some sort."

"Well, we'll find out in a minute, just what he means," said Chot.

While Hank was heaping brush on the fire, Dave stood with his revolvers leveled at the boys, whom Hank had huddled in a little group, so that all were in easy range.

"Now, you fellers stand still," said Dave. "We don't want any monkey business."

"Do we look like we're trying to run away?" asked Tom. "Don't worry—we're going to stay right here and find out what all this means. We've nothing to run for."

"Oh, is that so? Well, maybe I can convince you different. Here now, Hank. Get out your revolvers and watch these fellers close, while I question 'em."

Hank did as he was bidden, seeming to take great pleasure in leveling his weapons at the boys.

"Point those things in the air, can't you?" asked Fleet, nervously. "I know you don't want to shoot us, but one of them might go off by accident, and I'm not ready to give up this canoe trip just yet."

"Canoe trip?" queried Dave, suspiciously. "Where's the canoes?"

"Right before your eyes, old man," said Chot, pointing to where the canoes were lying beneath one of the trees.

"Don't call me 'old man'!" snapped Dave. "I won't stand for nothin' like that!"

Then he walked over and took a look at the canoes.

"Where'd you pick 'em up?" he asked.

"I don't know that it's any of your business," Chot replied, "Isn't it about time you were telling us why you've got us standing here at the point of your revolvers? We haven't done anything to you."

"Oh, you haven't, eh? Well, maybe not, but I'll bet you know who robbed my house last night, all right. Oh, you fellers think you can wriggle out of this business, but we've got you dead to rights, ain't we, Hank?"

"Certainly have," was Hank's reply.

"You say your house was robbed last night?"

It was Chot who put the question.

"Yes; you know very well it was robbed."

"I knew nothing of the kind. We were not in this neighborhood last night."

"Then how comes it I find you trespassin' on my property?" demanded Dave. "Tell me that."

"We didn't know it was your property. We came up the lake in our canoes, searching for a place to camp for the night. This seemed to be the nicest looking spot, so we came ashore."

"That's a pretty good tale, but it won't work. You ain't got no proof."

"We have plenty of proof. You say your house was robbed last night?"

"Yes, sir; last night. The thieves got away with eighty dollars in gold that I had locked in a bureau drawer."

"Well, last night we camped on the shores of Lake George, and at noon today we entered Lake Champlain and took dinner at a little village called Delano."

"Delano? Look out—I know where that is. I may take a notion to telephone down there and look you fellers up."

"Just what we're trying to get you to do. Practically the whole village saw us land there, and saw us start north after we had eaten our meal. So now that we have some basis of proof on which to proceed, suppose you look us up, and let's have done with this nonsense."

Dave and Hank whispered together a moment, then the former said:

"Step out here, one by one, so I can get a good look at you."

Fleet was the first to obey this command.

Dave and Hank looked him up and down, then shook their heads.

"Nope," said Hank, "that can't be him."

Each of the other boys in turn underwent the close scrutiny of their captors, and when the inspection was over both Dave and Hank seemed in a quandary.

"Don't none of 'em answer the description," said Hank, a dismal note in his voice. "What we goin' to do now?"

"Do I take it from your remarks that one of you saw these thieves?" asked Chot.

"Yes," returned Dave, and there was a more civil note in his voice. "My old woman saw 'em both, and one of 'em pretty distinctly. He was a big man—bigger'n any of you fellers. I guess we owe you an apology. You're not the thieves, but still you're trespassing on my land. I don't allow no campers here."

"Now, look here, Mr.—er——" began Chot.

"Higgins, sir—Dave Higgins."

"All right, Mr. Higgins. Now, do you realize that you've laid a very grave

charge at our door, placing us under suspicion, as well as under the noses of your revolvers, without giving us a chance to explain who we are? Wait a minute—don't interrupt. I'm going to give you a bit of our family history. We're cadets from Winton Hall, a military school on the Hudson, and we're on our way to the Thousand Islands in the St. Lawrence River. We camped peacefully on your land—at least, you say it's yours———"

"And I can prove that easy enough, too," said Dave.

"Well, we camped peacefully, here, not knowing that we were trespassing. We intend only to stay till sunrise before proceeding on up the lake. So now, after knowing this, with a full opportunity to investigate our record as we came up the river and through Lake George, you must either exonerate us from all blame, either as thieves or trespassers, or we'll stay here till you prove that we're guilty. And if you don't prove it, someone will go to jail—and it won't be us."

"Oh, say, now, boys, we didn't mean no harm," said Dave. "We didn't know who you was, and we thought sure we'd got track of the fellers that stole the money. But we're willin' to admit our mistake, and just to make things square, you stay here just as long as you please, and before you leave to-morrow come over to my house, which is right across on Chimney Point, and set down to the finest breakfast you've had in many a day. Is that fair?"

"Entirely satisfactory to us, Mr. Higgins, and now, just to show you that our hearts are in the right place, let me say that we saw two suspicious looking characters on the shore here about dusk to-night."

"You did? Where are they now?"

"That I am unable to say. We were just lighting our fire when they came up, and when they discovered that there were others about, they lit out up the shore as hard as they could go."

"What did they look like—do you remember?"

"We couldn't see their features plainly, but one was an extremely large man, wearing a light felt hat. The other, as I remember, was somewhat smaller. Both had on dark clothes."

"Them's the fellers," said Dave Higgins, decisively. "We've been on the wrong trail all evening, Hank. The only thing we can do now is wait till to-morrow and try and locate 'em by telephone in some of the neighborin' towns. I'm sorry to have troubled you boys this way," he added, turning to the young canoeists.

"Oh, that's all right," said Chot. "Your mistake was a perfectly natural one."

Now that Dave Higgins seemed disposed to do the right thing, the boys felt no animosity toward him for the summary fashion in which he and his friend, Hank, had held them up.

"Well, Hank and I'll leave you now," said Higgins, "and mind you, we'll look for you over to the house for breakfast. Will you come?"

Chot looked inquiringly at the other boys.

"Any wheat cakes and maple syrup?" asked Fleet, his mouth watering.

"Bushels of 'em," was Dave Higgins' reply.

"Then count me in."

"I think you may look for all of us, Mr. Higgins," said Chot, "and thank you."

"Oh, that's all right, boys. Good night."

"Good night, Mr. Higgins."

"Good night," said Hank.

"Good night," responded the boys.

They heard Dave and Hank discussing the robbery as they entered the skiff and pushed off into the lake. The sound of oars grew softer and softer, and finally died away altogether.

Without further discussion of the events of the night, the boys sought their blankets, and nothing more occurred to disturb their slumbers.

They were up with the sun for a bath in the lake, and when they finally embarked and paddled across in the direction of the big white house they could see shining through the trees on Chimney Point, they were hungry enough to have eaten plain corn meal and water.

But no such repast as this was set before them; on the contrary, they sat down to a table fairly loaded with good things. Dave Higgins and his wife seemed anxious to correct the mistake the former had made of taking the boys for thieves, and the result was wheat cakes, maple syrup, coffee, hot muffins, and fried potatoes, with eggs cooked in any style for those who desired them.

New milk was also provided in abundant quantities, and when the boys had finished and were telling the Higgins family good-bye at the edge of the lake, and wishing them every success in apprehending the robbers, they felt as if they would not care to eat again for a week.

They soon left Crown and Chimney Points behind, as they paddled rapidly up the lake, which broadened out now into a fine body of water, dotted here and there with small craft, both of the sailing and motor variety.

The boys were about to settle down into their slow, even strokes, for the sun was getting high in the heavens and the heat becoming intense, when an incident occurred which served to relieve the monotony of the day.

CHAPTER XII—THE FIGHT ON THE LAKE

Fleet was the first to notice a skiff containing two men, well out in the middle of the lake and making on a tangent for the east shore.

"Look!" he cried. "What'll you bet that those are not Dave Higgins' robbers?"

"I don't think that would be a safe bet," said Bert. "What do you think, Chot?"

"They are too far away for me to judge accurately, but from this distance I should say there was a marked resemblance."

"I wish Higgins were here," said Tom.

"Well, it's two miles to his place. Too far to go, because the men would then have too great a start," said Chot. "I believe the best plan will be to overtake them, make sure they are the ones we suspect, and if so, capture them and hold them until we can communicate with Higgins or the authorities. What do you say?"

All of the boys expressed great eagerness to do this, so they quickened their gait until the canoes were fairly flying through the water. It did not matter now if the perspiration ran down their faces, into their eyes, and down their backs inside their shirts; they did not feel the exertion with an adventure in prospect. No real American boy does.

The figures in the skiff were nearly a mile away, but the comrades soon cut this distance down to three-quarters, and headed for a spot that would cross the path of the other craft within the next ten or fifteen minutes, if the men held their present course.

The men in the boat had evidently not noticed the boys in the canoes, and when they finally did discover them, the canoes were between them and the shore for which they were heading.

They stopped rowing for a moment and the boys could see them holding

a consultation. There was no doubt now but that the men were the suspicious-looking characters they had seen on the shore the previous night.

"Wonder what they're going to do now," said Fleet.

"They're trying to decide whether we are interested in them or not," Chot replied. "I think they are waiting in the hope that we will cross their course and continue on up the lake. Shows they don't want to come to close quarters with us."

"What will we do—wait for them?"

"No; for we're apt to find that they can wait as long as we. I think we had better do away with any deception. They suspect that we are watching them, so let's paddle over there and tell them just what we are here for."

"Yes," said Tom, "for these are the parties we're after. Look at the size of that fellow at the oars. He certainly answers the description given by Mrs. Higgins, who saw him as he was getting away with the money."

So the canoes were turned and the boys paddled easily across the intervening distance.

"Let's surround them," said Chot in a low tone, and the canoes separated until they were approaching the men in the skiff from every side.

Five boys with determined looks on their faces are no mean antagonists, especially when no matter in what direction you turn you find one of them, and the men in the skiff were evidently perplexed.

"Hello!" said Chot, by way of greeting.

"Hello, yourself!" returned the smaller of the men. "What do you think you are doing?"

"We're surrounding you," said Chot, "and now we'll ask you to give an account of yourselves."

"Well, just ask away, sonny."

"Yes, don't be bashful. If there's anything we can tell you, don't fail to mention it," said the big man.

He was apparently resting easily on his oars, but Chot noticed that he was in a position where he could send the skiff spinning ahead in an instant.

Pod, as if guessing what was passing in Chot's mind, pushed his canoe around until he was directly behind the man at the oars, and straight in the path of the skiff.

"To make a long story short," said Chot, "we didn't know who you were when you ran into our camp on the lake shore last night."

"Don't know what you're talking about," said the smaller man. "We've never seen you fellows before."

"That tale won't go. We saw you last night, and we'd know you again if we met you in China, so there's no use trying to evade the issue. What is more, we

know you are the men who robbed Dave Higgins' house two nights ago."

At this the men burst into a laugh, but it was an unnatural laugh, and could not deceive the keen ears of the boys from Winton.

"Young man," said the bigger of the men, "if it wasn't so funny, your talk would be impertinent. Why, we live at Westport, farther up the lake. This is Henry Skidmore and I am William Truesdale. We are merchants, and we have been taking a little outing."

"That being the case," said Chot, "of course you won't object to going to Westport with us and giving proof of what you say?"

"That's asking too much. Westport is five miles from here, at least, and we would be losing too much time. However, you boys can stop off there as you pass and inquire as to our characters."

"Yes, we'll do that—I don't think!" said Fleet, rather contemptuously. "The best thing we can do with these men, Chot, is to take them to Dave Higgins so his wife can identify them."

"I think so, too," said Bert. "That's the easiest way out of the matter."

"Now, look here," said the big man, glowering at them from under his heavy eyebrows, and speaking in a voice that rumbled like a smoldering volcano, "this has gone far enough. We're bound for the east shore over there, and you will follow us at your peril."

"We're going to hand you over to the authorities, and it may as well be on the east shore as anywhere," said Chot.

"Then look out for us," warned the man at the oars. He sent the skiff shooting ahead as he spoke, rammed squarely into Pod's canoe, upsetting it and throwing the little fellow into the water. The skiff shuddered from the force of the impact, careened to one side, righted itself, and sped on.

"After them!" shouted Fleet, "I'll attend to Pod."

Following his suggestion, Chot, Tom and Bert started in pursuit of the skiff, which they had no difficulty in overtaking, because they could paddle all around any man with a heavy skiff and an ordinary pair of oars.

Fleet ran his canoe over to where Pod, grinning good naturedly, was clinging to the bottom of the upturned craft.

"Got me that time," said the little fellow, "but I guess a bath won't hurt me."

With the aid of Fleet the canoe was righted. Then Pod swam to where his suitcase and paddle were floating on the surface of the lake, and pushed them toward the canoe. Then, climbing aboard while Fleet steadied the craft, the boys set out in pursuit of their chums.

In the meantime the other boys had come up with the men in the skiff, and keeping out of their way, ran alongside so that they could land first, and intercept the suspects as they came ashore.

Finally, the man at the oars grew angry, and pulling a revolver from his pocket, leveled it at Bert, who was the nearest the skiff.

"Now you drop that paddle or I'll plug you, kid," he said. "This foolishness has gone far enough."

So interested were the men in finding out what Bert would do in the face of such an argument, they forgot Chot who was on the other side of them, and who, with his usual quick-wittedness, lost no time in acting. Dropping his paddle, he seized his suitcase, and standing erect in the canoe, threw it with all his might straight at the head of the man with the revolver.

An earthquake could not have been more surprising or more destructive at that moment. True to its aim went the suitcase. It contained Chot's best suit of clothes and other wearing apparel, but this did not enter into the argument at that time. The case struck the big man on the side of the head. His grasp on the revolver loosened and the weapon fell with a splash into the lake. The big man, stunned by the blow, after a futile attempt to regain his balance, followed, capsizing the skiff and throwing his companion into the water.

"Hurrah!" cried Tom.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" echoed Fleet and Pod, who came up at this moment.

The boys now had their adversaries where they wanted them—at a decided disadvantage.

"Take that skiff, Fleet, and tow it out of the way," ordered Chot. "You, Pod, pick up my suit case. Now, boys, let's attend to our friends."

The men were swimming around in an effort to keep afloat, afraid to approach the canoes for fear of further violence.

"You'll have to help me, boys," cried the smaller of the men, suddenly. "My friend's losing his strength. Guess that blow on the head sort o' queered him."

At first the boys thought this was merely a feint to gain time, but one look at the big man made them change their minds. His eyes were closed, his face was pale, and he was gasping for breath.

Fortunately, they were not far from the east shore now, and a sandy beach stretched out into the lake. With the help of the boys in the canoe they towed the apparently unconscious man into shallow water, and helped get him up on the grass under some trees where an effort was made to revive him.

On the side of his head was a big lump, caused by the blow from the suit case. A feeling of pity stole over Chot that he had been forced to adopt such measures, but with Bert threatened by a revolver, he felt that he had been fully justified.

Fleet brought a cup of water from a well in a nearby pasture and the boys bathed the temples of the big man, and forced some of the cool water down his throat. After a few minutes he gasped and opened his eyes, and a little later was

able to sit up against a tree.

As soon as Chot found that the injured man was coming around, he sent Pod to a farmhouse which could be seen in the distance, to find if they had the rural 'phone service, and if so, to communicate with Dave Higgins and ask him to come at once with some officers and take charge of the prisoners. Pod found the 'phone and after some little trouble succeeded in getting his man. He explained the adventure on the lake, and Higgins agreed to come right up with Hank and a couple of constables.

In the interval, the boys made the injured man comfortable, bathing his head with witch hazel. Both he and the other man, as well as Pod, took this occasion to shed their clothes and spread them in the sun to dry, wrapping themselves in blankets in the meantime.

It was nearly noon when Higgins arrived with the officers. The men were searched and in the big man's pocket most of the Higgins' money was found contained in the little sack in which Higgins had always kept it. The men confessed to the robbery, pleading hard luck and starvation. They said good-bye good-naturedly, as Higgins and the officers led them to the boat and started with them for Chimney Point.

The boys ate their lunch on the shore, after which they pushed off again, touched Westport in the middle of the afternoon for ice cream soda, and camped on the west shore near Split Rock Mountain for the night.

CHAPTER XIII—DOWN THE RICHELIEU RIVER

Split Rock Mountain was the most delightful place the Comrades had yet discovered in which to make a camp. The day had been rather a strenuous one, and the boys were glad to seek comfortable blankets under the tent-top.

Nothing occurred to mar the peaceful quiet of the night, and the boys awoke at sun-up for their usual morning plunge in the lake. Breakfast, consisting of coffee, bread and butter, and canned meat, was eaten with a relish, and then the

boys pushed out into the lake again, eager to be on their way. They were getting well up into New York State now, and would soon cross the line into Canada.

The next night they spent on the east shore, some miles above Burlington, and the afternoon of the following day found them off Plattsburg, famous in history through the great naval battle in Plattsburg Bay, in which Thomas McDonough, commanding the American squadron, had vanquished the English commander, Downie, in a battle lasting two and one-half hours, at the end of which time Downie and many of his officers had been killed, and the British ships were disabled and obliged to strike their colors. The American squadron was badly injured, too, but the victory over the British was most complete and probably did more toward bringing an end to the war than any other single event.

A feeling of awe stole over the boys as they realized that they were on the spot where one of America's greatest naval heroes had won undying renown.

"Makes a fellow feel like fighting, himself," said Pod.

"Well, if you want to fight yourself, why don't you do it?" said Fleet.

"There you go putting a wrong construction on my words," snapped the little fellow. "I mean, it makes you feel like you'd like to—to—well—like—to——"

"Fight yourself," said Fleet. "Sure; you told us that before."

Hugging the shore of Grand Isle, the boys finally left Plattsburg behind. Canoeing was a pleasure now, as the weather was cooler, and a fine breeze from the south tempered the heat, and fairly pushed the canoes to the northward with its power.

Between Isle La Motte and the Vermont mainland they paddled, camping again on a promontory jutting out into the lake a few miles below Rouses' Point.

"I tell you, fellows, this is real life," said Fleet, and for a wonder Pod agreed with him. The grandeur of the scenery held a strange fascination for Pod, who had traveled so little. He had pictured such things very frequently, but this trip was beyond his wildest dreams, and for an entire day and a half he forgot to crack a joke—something so unusual that the boys commented upon it.

"Well, how's this one?" he asked, as they all sat on the shore of the lake, after pitching the tent and preparing things for the night.

"How's what one?" demanded Fleet.

"Well, give me a chance to tell it, won't you?"

"Surely; proceed."

"Why was the man who had been rolling all night in a steamer berth, mad when the steward opened the door in the morning and spoke to him?"

"Give it up," said Chot.

"Because the steward asked him if he wouldn't have a fresh roll for breakfast."

"Bad," commented Bert.

"Then how's this one?" said Pod. "Why is the ocean like a good housekeeper?"

"Oh, we'll give that one up, too?"

"Because it is very tidy."

"I can't stand this; I'm going to bed," Fleet announced.

"Oh, don't go to bed, yet; recite some verses," suggested Chot.

It was surprising how quickly Fleet's manner underwent a change at that.

"Why, I'll be glad to oblige if you fellows really want to hear them," said Fleet, seating himself again.

"Oh, delighted," said Tom in a dismal tone, which made Pod snicker, and Bert laugh out loud.

"But if you're going to laugh at me I don't care to recite," said Fleet.

"Oh, go on," said Tom. "Don't mind me."

He really liked to hear Fleet's compositions, but was reluctant in telling Fleet so, fearing that Fleet, through the kindness of his heart, would overburden them with verses.

"I have composed a very touching little thing entitled, 'A Mosquito Bite On the Arm Is Worth Two On the Nose.'"

"Sounds like a minstrel show," said Pod.

"Maybe it is," said Chot. "Anyway, I heard a few alleged jokes flying around loose awhile ago."

"Yes; and there are more where those came from," said Pod.

"Well, it's up to Fleet now," said Chot. "Proceed Fleetsy."

Fleet proceeded to rattle off a half dozen verses about camping in New Jersey with mosquitoes for companions and ending with "a bite on the arm, is better than two on the nose, oh, tarm." Then he paused.

"Well, go on; finish it," advised Tom.

"It's finished," said Fleet.

"What! you don't mean that you have the nerve to perpetrate a thing like that on us and call it a poem?"

"Surely."

"Well, if that isn't the worst I ever heard. Don't you ever, ever start anything like that again."

"What I want to know," said Bert, "is the meaning of the word, 'tarm'."

"'Tarm?'" repeated Fleet. "I used no such word."

"'Is better than two on the nose, oh, tarm,' is the last line."

"Oh, that's so. Well you fellows know what 'tarm' means, don't you?"

"No; we don't. Tell us."

"Why tarm means that if—er—well——"

"A very lucid explanation," said Pod. "I didn't know the word had so much

meaning."

"Oh, you make me tired," said Fleet.

"And you make us tired, reeling off your fake verses, and then because you're at a loss for something to rhyme with arm, bring in a word that has no meaning."

"If you fellows don't like my verses why do you ask me to recite?"

"We won't any more; be sure of that," said Chot. "The idea. 'Tarm!' That's a fine word, and your explanation of its meaning was so clear. Guess you'd better seek your little bed, my boy."

And without another word Fleet obeyed. He knew they were right. The poem had been a makeshift piece of work from beginning to end, and only his eagerness to oblige when they asked for something had led him to recite it. Fleet had a fine talent for rhyming, which would eventually develop into something substantial, but he had a very bad habit of composing his verses quickly, hardly revising them, and throwing in rhymes that were not permissable. To get him out of this habit the boys were now determined, and the lesson on the shore of the lake was but the opening gun in the campaign.

The boys followed their usual plan in the morning of taking a bath in the lake before breakfast. The water was smooth and deep, and they swam and splashed about for half an hour before finally crawling out for a rub down. Then a cup of coffee and such eatables as they had in the canoes made them feel fit for another day's work.

They were virtually in the Richelieu River now, which broadens out at its source until it would be difficult to tell where Lake Champlain leaves off and the river begins.

The boys found the Richelieu to be a treacherous stream. Rapids and whirlpools of a rather timid variety abounded on all sides, and frequently they were forced to steer their canoes in between huge boulders which reared themselves out of the stream.

This was new sport to each of them, and the fact that there was just a touch of danger made the trip down the Richelieu all the more enjoyable.

Very little paddling was necessary. The swift current, moving relentlessly onward to join its forces with that of the mighty St. Lawrence, swept them along at a rapid rate—in many instances much more rapid than they would have desired, but there was nothing to do but cast themselves on the mercy of the water, steering in and out among the rocks as best they could.

The river abounded with innumerable small islands, and had an exasperating propensity for splitting up into small channels, into any one of which the canoes might shoot. Some of these were narrow, and through them the waters flowed like a mill race, to emerge, perhaps, on the broad bosom of a peaceful river

beyond.

It was a fascinating stream, its waters cool like those of the majority of Canadian rivers.

The boys spent the night at St. Johns, passing Iberville at dusk and shooting under the great railroad bridge that spans the river between these two cities.

Their journey from here on was uneventful, except that they were kept constantly on the alert by the varying moods of the river; now moving peacefully along over an almost placid bosom, now plunging into another narrow channel between two islands, where the waters were swift and dangerous.

But the boys got safely through it all, and were forced to admit that the experience had been worth a great deal to them. No one could go down the Richelieu into the St. Lawrence without knowing considerable about the intricacies of canoeing, and even Pod's chest swelled with pride to think of what he had been through.

Two days after leaving St. Johns the boys arrived at Sorel and saw the mighty St. Lawrence before them, the waters of the Richelieu flowing peacefully into the larger stream at this point, with no suggestion of the rough spots lying between the mouth and the source.

"Gee! what a river!" exclaimed Pod, as he let his eyes roam out over the great stream, until they rested on the shore in the distance. Islands to the number of hundreds dot the surface of the river above Montreal, and many of these were visible from Sorel.

The boys ate a hearty dinner before entering their canoes again, and it was one o'clock in the afternoon when they pushed off into the St. Lawrence, heading in a southwesterly direction.

"This is going to be a pull against the current, fellows," said Chot, "but I guess we can make it."

"Seems hard though, after floating down the Richelieu the way we did," Tom responded.

But they paddled easily, and while their progress was slow compared to their journey down the Richelieu, the shore slowly faded in the distance. Situated on a great bend in the river some distance above Sorel, is Montreal, the metropolis of Canada, of which the boys had heard so much, and here they arrived the next afternoon, after spending the night on one of the smaller islands. It had been decided to spend at least one day ashore before continuing the journey up the river.

CHAPTER XIV—IN MONTREAL

Montreal, a city rich in historic interest, was a place of great fascination for the Comrades and their chums. It was Pod's first visit to a city of any size, and his curious stares and delighted exclamations were both pleasing and amusing to the other boys.

"If I didn't know better," Pod remarked, as they started up town, having left their canoes in charge of a boat captain on the river front, "I'd say Montreal was bigger than New York."

"Montreal has 350,000 people," said Chot; "at least, that's what my guide-book says."

They were walking along one of the principal business thoroughfares, when Tom collided with a young fellow who was hurrying in an opposite direction. Each begged the other's pardon, then Tom uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Well, look who's here!" he cried.

"Eh?" said the other. "Well, if it isn't Tom Pratt."

"What are you doing in Montreal, Sam Green?"

"I might ask the same of you," returned Sam, for it was indeed the Bayville boy whom they had met during their summer in camp, and later in New York, where Sam was a cub reporter on the *Leader*, his Uncle Jim, who was one of the editors, having secured him the place. "And here's Chot Duncan, and Fleet Kenby, and who's this? Pod Meelick, as I live! Well, youngster, I am certainly surprised to see you up here."

"And this is our friend, Bert Creighton," said Chot, as the boys were shaking hands all around.

"I am glad to know you, Mr. Green," said Bert.

"Same here," was the reply, "only make it plain Sam. Mr. Green doesn't sound natural."

"All right, Sam," said Bert.

"But you haven't told us what you're doing in Montreal, Sam," said Tom.

"No; and you fellows haven't told me what you're doing here. Turn about is fair play."

"We're on a canoe trip," Tom explained. "We started at Winton Hall on the Hudson, came up through the lakes and the Richelieu River into the St. Lawrence, thence to Montreal."

"What! are you fellows at Winton now?"

"Yes; we've just finished our first year."

"I heard that Truem Wright was there," said Sam.

"Yes, and he seems disposed to be good now, so we have taken him into the fold. But come, Sam, what are you doing in Canada?"

"I'm on a two weeks' vacation."

"Are you still on the *Leader*?"

"Surely; I'm the police reporter now. I expect to land the city desk one of these fine days."

"The city desk?" queried Pod, a blank look on his face.

"He means that he hopes someday to be city editor," said Chot, who was familiar with newspaper terms. "And are you going to be a newspaperman all your life, Sam?"

"Looks that way. Had a hard time at first. You remember when you fellows were in New York? I was pretty green then, but I'm getting over that. Being a reporter has lost its glamour now, and I've settled down to business. They tell me I write some pretty good stories, and Uncle Jim says he'll make me city editor just as soon as I've had a little more experience."

"I'll bet it's a fine life," said Pod, to whom anything connected with a city appealed.

"It is if you like it," said Sam. "Pay isn't great, but there's a chance to make a pretty decent living."

Sam had turned now and was walking up the street with the boys. He was thoroughly familiar with Montreal, and learning that his friends wanted to see some of the interesting points in the city, agreed to pilot them around.

They visited, in turn, the great Church of Notre Dame; the old French-Canadian market place, with its French signs and throngs of French-Canadians, who still adhere to the tongue and customs of France; the Chateau de Ramezay, once the residence of the French governors, where the treaty was negotiated that lost an empire to France; the ancient Seminary of St. Sulpice, and many other spots, including a tour along the river front, where craft of all shapes and sizes, from ocean-going vessels to the smallest of fishing smacks, were to be observed.

"And you say you are bound for the Thousand Islands?" queried Sam, as the boys finally entered one of the city's pretty parks and seated themselves on a

bench for a chat.

"Yes; we expect to leave in the morning," Chot replied.

"In your canoes?"

"Surely."

"Of course, you know that you can't canoe very far up the St. Lawrence?"

"We can't? How is that, Sam?"

"The rapids, my boy. Fiercest things you ever saw. Reminds me of Niagara above the falls. I shot the Lachine Rapids, just above Montreal, in a steamer the other day, and I want to tell you there was some excitement on board."

"And canoes cannot go through the rapids?"

"Well, I should say not—that is, going up stream, and I shouldn't advise anyone to try and shoot the rapids coming down. It's bad enough when you're on a steamer."

"But I understood that you could paddle all the way to the Thousand Islands from Montreal," said Chot, a disappointed note in his voice.

"And so you can, but you'll have to use the canals."

"The canals?"

"Yes; didn't you know of them?"

The boys were forced to confess their ignorance.

"The Canadian government," continued Sam, "has constructed canals around all the rapids, and there are plenty of them between here and Lake Ontario, I assure you. Otherwise the steamers could not get back up the river. But you can use the river part of the way, all right. For instance, you first pass through the Lachine Canal. Then you cross the mouth of the Ottawa River, and enter the Soulanges Canal, which enters the St. Lawrence again near Coteau Landing. Then you can use the river to Cornwall where you enter the Cornwall Canal. This takes you around the Long Sault Rapids. You go from this into the Rapids du Plat Canal, which takes you around Rapids du Plat. Then the Galops Canal takes you around the Galops Rapids. That lands you in Prescott. From there on to the Thousand Islands is smooth sailing, except that you'll have to paddle against a pretty strong current."

The boys found a map in one of the railway offices, and Sam pointed out the canals which were plainly marked.

"I'll just take one of these maps to refer to," said Chot. "Funny I had never noticed those canals."

The boys invited Sam to go to the Thousand Islands with them, as Fleet's canoe would hold two persons, but he said his vacation was nearly over, and that he would be due in New York by the time the Comrades reached their destination.

"I expect to see you all in New York again one of these days, and I hope to be able to show you a good time," he said.

"Well, we certainly had an abundance of excitement on our last visit," said Tom. "What, with the burning hotel, and the chase of the smugglers, and various and sundry smaller happenings, we were kept pretty much on the move."

"Well, I'll try and see that you don't burn out next time, anyway," smiled Sam.

"Why, that fire was the means of winning for Fleet undying renown," said Chot.

"Oh, pshaw! it did nothing of the kind," protested the fleshy lad.

"Well, you rescued Mr. Shelton's little child from the building, and we got an invitation to visit his ranch in New Mexico."

"Did you go?" asked Sam.

"Did we go?" repeated Tom, laying great emphasis on the words. "Catch us refusing an invitation like that."

"To refuse invitations of any nature that demand traveling is not in line with the policy of the Experience Club," said Chot. "We spent quite a bit of time in the west before returning to find that our parents had decided to send us to Winton Hall."

The boys bade Sam good-bye with feelings of regret, for, while their acquaintance with him had not been of an intimate nature, they had always liked him and were glad of his company at any time.

Upon leaving Sam the boys went down to the river front where they had left their canoes.

"We had better get out of the city before dark," said Chot, "and find a good camping place, if possible."

"Yes; for if we spent the night in the city we would have to leave our canoes with a stranger, and I'm not in favor of that," said Bert.

They found their canoes in the same condition as when they left them, floating alongside the fishing sloop. The captain of the sloop, a French-Canadian, sat on the deck nearby, smoking a short-stemmed pipe. When the boys appeared he arose with a grunt and helped them from the wharf on to the deck.

"You lak de ceetey—eh?" he inquired, leering at them through beady black eyes.

"Yes; it's a fine town," said Chot. "We like it very much."

"Oh, Montreal, she pretty good place," said the captain. "I leeve here all my life. I lak it, too."

The boys asked the captain to direct them to the Lachine Canal, which he did. Then they paid him for keeping the canoes while they were up town. He pocketed the change with an indifferent gesture, as much as to say that money did not represent a great deal to him. Then the boys paddled off up the river, past steamers and other crafts, large and small. Entering the canal, which runs right

through the heart of the city of Montreal, to enter the river again at Lachine, on the southern shore of the island, the boys paddled rapidly along.

There was a difference in the atmosphere, now; the humidity in evidence during certain portions of the day in the early stages of their trip, was now absent, the air was cool and invigorating, and while the sun was rather warm at times, it was not that suffocating heat that made them stop all labor until the air grew cooler.

Soon they arrived at the Lachine end of the Canal, and as they paddled out into the open water again, and headed for Isle Perrot, which could be seen in the distance, they could see the dangerous Lachine Rapids off to their left, churning the river into foam, and roaring like a miniature Niagara.

"No wonder they had to build a canal," said Fleet.

"It's a wonder to me that those rapids are passable from any direction," said Bert.

"But they are. See that steamer! She's just getting into them."

Following the direction of Chot's extended hand, they saw one of the river boats which ply between Toronto, Thousand Islands, Montreal and Quebec, just as she was entering the rapids. Swaying from side to side, turning first this way, then that, as a skilful pilot guided her through the safer spots, she raced ahead at a rapid pace, with all steam shut off.

"Say, I'd like to be on her," said Pod.

"Maybe you wouldn't after you got in the rapids," said Fleet.

"I think it would be a fine trip."

"I agree with you," said Chot. "A little excitement is healthy."

Tom and Bert nodded their heads to signify their approval of this remark.

"But we can't go everywhere or do everything during one vacation," said Chot, "so let's be satisfied with our trip as originally planned. By the time we've had enough of the Thousand Islands we'll have to make a bee-line for Mortonville if we expect to spend any time with our folks before the fall term opens."

"And I must go to Bayville. Mr. Hounson would never forgive me if I passed him by," said Pod.

"Naturally not," said Chot. "He's your benefactor. You owe him everything."

"I know I do," said the little fellow earnestly. "If it hadn't been for him I never would have been able to enter Winton."

"I wonder how our telephone is getting along?" ventured Fleet.

"Very well, no doubt," said Chot. "Our folks have been making good use of it. There was nothing to do but have the batteries restored occasionally."

"And we'll use it again, won't we?" cried Fleet, delighted at the thought.

"Surely," said Tom. "I feel that we had a hard enough time getting it up, with Chot shirking his duty to talk to Lucy Pendleton, that we ought to get all the good

we can out of it."

It was fast growing dark, but the boys saw a number of lights on Isle Perrot, and headed toward one of these with the intention of seeking out a camping place.

CHAPTER XV—THE THOUSAND ISLANDS AT LAST

No more delightful camping ground could be imagined than that discovered by the boys on Isle Perrot. Lying at the mouth of the Ottawa River, the arms of which pass on either side, as they flow into the larger stream on their way to the sea, the island is at all times tempered by cooling breezes, and the nights, especially, are so comfortable that once the traveler reaches the island he is loath to leave it.

The boys had no difficulty in finding a grove in which to pitch their tent. There was one near the water's edge on the south shore. Across from here, Chot found by consulting his map, was Cascade Point, at the eastern end of the Soulanges Canal. This canal would carry them a great many miles around Cascades, Split Rock, Cedars and Coteau Rapids to Coteau Landing, where they would enter the river proper again.

Nothing occurred to disturb their slumbers. They awoke before sun-up, and despite the chilliness of the atmosphere, took a plunge in the cool waters of the river.

By seven-thirty they were on their way again, and paddling across the few intervening miles, they entered the Soulanges Canal. Here, of course, the water was smooth and still, and they moved along at a good rate, though the current somewhat retarded their progress.

Late in the afternoon they arrived at Coteau's Landing, where they decided to spend another night. This spot is one of the most interesting on the St. Lawrence. Stretching out before them was Lake St. Francis, over which, by utilizing Clark and Grand Islands, one of our large railway systems has erected a

bridge, almost at the head of Coteau Rapids. It is a magnificent piece of railway construction, and brought forth many admiring comments from the boys.

The next day's journey took them as far as Cornwall, and they camped that night on the banks of the Cornwall Canal, after laying in a supply of provisions in the city.

Starting again in the early morning, the boys paddled through the canal, emerging at the upper edge of the Long Sault Rapids, and, hugging the shore, arrived late that night in Morrisburg.

By strenuous labors the following day they negotiated both the Rapid Plat and Galops Canals, arriving the next night at Prescott.

"Gee! but that's some traveling," said Pod, as they were pitching their tent again on the shore of the river.

"Well, we are past the last of the rapids," said Chot. "Everything should be smooth sailing—or, rather paddling—into Rockport, which is within easy distance of practically every one of the Thousand Islands."

"Say, are there really a thousand of them?" asked Fleet.

"I suppose there are—very likely more, but you must remember that many of them are but mere suggestions of islands—little tufts of grass, as it were, sticking up in the river."

"I hope we'll be able to find a good place in which to make our camp," said Tom.

"My idea," said Chot, "is to scout around among the islands for a few days to see if we can't rent some sort of a cottage or lodge, where we can be comfortable in both pleasant and stormy weather, without depending too much on our little tent."

"That's a fine idea," said Bert, "but, somehow, I imagine all such places are rented."

"Possibly. At the same time, people come and go all summer long. If we watch our chance we may be able to get what we want."

"Don't you think that idea deserves a poem?" asked Bert, slyly winking at Chot.

"Oh, by all means," said Chot, returning the wink.

Not since the evening they had subjected his verses to such severe criticism had Fleet attempted to recite. It was as if all thoughts of such things had been driven from his mind.

"Now, don't start anything," he advised them. "You didn't appreciate my last effort, so I've decided to recite my verses to the trees hereafter."

"Well, just imagine we're the trees," said Pod—"and perhaps we are; we all have trunks."

"And they're pretty well packed after that supper we ate," smiled Chot.

They kept urging Fleet to recite, but he stolidly refused. Finally, some one suggested a song, and in this Fleet joined with a zest. But when they tried to start the Winton song, and waited on the second verse for him to come in with his original lines, there was blank silence.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Tom.

"Nothing," replied Fleet, "only I'm not in the mood for original verses tonight."

So they fell into the old-time darkey melodies, then into the choruses of several popular ballads, in all of which Fleet joined with enthusiasm; but at every suggestion of original matter from him, he turned a deaf ear.

"Well, if Fleet won't recite, I'll crack a joke," said Pod. "Did you fellows ever hear of the man who had no flowers, yet kept a hot house?"

"No; how was that?" asked Bert.

"He had a scolding wife," was Pod's reply. "And did you ever hear of the little boy at school whom a visiting gentleman asked if his family ever played baseball?"

"No; starts off like a chestnut, but I've never heard it," said Tom. "What did bright little Willie say?"

"Bright little Willie said: 'Yes; me and mother play—I bawl and she makes the base hits.'"

At this there was a laugh in which Fleet joined. Noticing Fleet's good humor, they tried again to get him to recite, but he shook his head.

"No; the next time you fellows hear from me you won't be inclined to jolly quite so much," he said.

"Eh? What do you mean by that?" asked Tom.

"Never mind; let's change the subject."

The boys were silent. Could this be their chum who, formerly, had hardly waited to be asked to recite—who would spring eagerly up on the slightest provocation and reel off rhymes by the dozen? They wondered what had come over him, but decided to let the matter drop for the moment.

"Fleet's got something up his sleeve," said Chot, a little later when the boys were preparing for bed and Fleet was, for the moment, out of earshot.

"I suppose we hurt his feelings the other night," said Bert. "We were a little severe."

"But we needed to be," said Tom. "Those were the worst verses he has ever recited. I want to see his work improve, not get worse."

"But you must remember," said Pod, always ready to stick up for Fleet, in spite of their many disagreements, "that no one can recite verses on a minute's notice and keep the standard up all the time. I'll admit that Tom is right about the quality, but we ought to ease up on him now. I believe we have taught him his

lesson, so let's give him a chance to forget it, and I don't believe he'll try to run in any more fake rhymes on us."

"Sh! don't let him hear you," said Bert.

Fleet, who had been rummaging in his canoe, was returning and the boys turned the talk into other channels.

They decided to make the rest of the canoe trip by easy stages, so starting early the next morning, they stopped off at Prescott for supplies, and continued on along the north shore to Brockville, where they had dinner.

After leaving Brockville, so many little islands dotted the surface of the river that the boys began to believe they were approaching their destination. These islands continued at intervals all the way to Rockport, fronting which city, late one afternoon, they sat in their canoes, viewing the famous summer resort of the St. Lawrence. The Thousand Islands lay before them, many dotted with cottages and tents, others, too small for comfortable living, uninhabited.

Somewhere out among those islands the boys were going to camp, and they could hardly wait until morning to set out in their quest of a suitable spot.

To those boys not familiar with the location of the Thousand Islands, it may be well to say that they spread out from the waters of Lake Ontario on the southwest to a narrow stretch of the St. Lawrence on the northeast, some thirty-eight miles distant, forming a chain, or archipelago, through which the clear, bright waters of the river go racing swiftly. They are composed of islands of all sizes, from a surface no larger than an ordinary dry-goods box, over which the water moves, to that of a substantial size, several miles in circumference, containing some villages, and, in one instance, an inland lake—the Lake of the Isles.

Hundreds of the islands contain no habitation, but stand, their rich, loamy surfaces covered with trees, in whose branches birds come to build. These islands remain undisturbed, save when pleasure seekers from some more populous center push their boats into the quiet reaches of their waters on a summer's day.

There are really many more than a thousand of the islands, the lowest estimate being fifteen hundred, the highest eighteen hundred. And flowing in between them, winding this way and that, the river is limpid, fast-moving and deep, the depth varying from thirty to sixty feet.

The delights of the region had a strong grip on the young canoeists when, after a night spent in Rockport, they set out in the early morning in search of a lonely isle, where they could rest in peace and comfort for a few weeks, enjoying boating, fishing or reading, as the case might be.

In and out among the many channels they went, paddling with slow, easy strokes, now going against a strong current, now with it, until, finally, they found innumerable little islands stretching on all sides, none of which were, apparently, inhabited.

It is a law commonly observed in the Thousand Islands that camping privileges upon any of the uninhabited islands are free, so the boys began to look about for a good-sized island which would meet their approval from every standpoint.

"There's a fine-looking island," said Bert, pointing to where, over the tops of two or three smaller islands, a wooded knoll came into view, looking cool and shady.

"Yes, and there's some sort of a house on it, too," said Tom.

"May be just what we want," said Chot. "Let's go over there, anyway, and perhaps the occupant of the house can direct us to a good camping ground."

"But let's get an uninhabited island," said Pod.

"Yes; let's be Crusoes or nothing," said Fleet. "Pod will make a good 'man Friday.'"

"Hey, you, don't start anything like that, or I'll ram your old craft and send you to the bottom," said Pod.

"Ram away," replied Fleet.

He well knew which craft would be the first to capsize if Pod kept his word.

"Well, I'll let you off this time," said Pod.

"For which I am deeply grateful," said Fleet, a slight tinge of sarcasm in his voice.

They soon reached the island under discussion, and landing, pulled their canoes up on the shore and fastened them securely to some of the smaller trees.

Then, as they started up the slight incline toward the lodge which topped the rise, a man came out on the verandah and stood, regarding them curiously.

CHAPTER XVI—MR. LAWRENCE OF WINNSOCKET LODGE

"Welcome to the island!" cried a cheerful voice, as the boys approached the lodge, and, looking up they saw that the stranger had removed a cigar from his mouth

and was smiling genially.

He was an attractive-looking man of perhaps thirty-five, slightly bald, his temples tinged with gray. He was fully six feet tall and of a magnificent physique.

"Thank you, sir," Chot responded. "We have no wish to intrude, but we are searching for a camping place."

"And the island looked good to you, eh?"

"Oh, we did not intend camping here."

"Well, there, what if you did. It's a pleasure I assure you to have you visit me. I so seldom see anyone who is sociable."

He came down to the foot of the steps, hand out-stretched to greet them.

"I am Jared Lawrence of Boston," he told them. "This is my summer cottage. I call it Winnsocket Lodge."

"And it's a beauty all right," said Fleet, after Chot had introduced each in turn—"just the sort of a place to have in the Thousand Islands."

The other boys echoed Fleet's sentiments.

"I suppose you wouldn't think of accepting a proposition from us for a month or so, Mr. Lawrence?" queried Chot.

"You mean that you want to rent the lodge?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now, that might be arranged easier than you imagine. But come in, all of you, and make yourselves comfortable."

He led the way on to the spacious verandah which looked out over a portion of the river and afforded an excellent view of many of the other islands.

"You see," continued Mr. Lawrence, "I am in a secluded spot, yet when I feel lonesome, I can watch the boats over yonder plying up and down the stream."

"Do you live alone, then?" asked Tom.

"Well, yes, except for my Japanese cook and valet. I suppose I may as well admit boys, that I am a bachelor," and he smiled rather indulgently. "I am fortunately able to come here with Hoki and spend the summers, going back to Boston in September or October to again take up my business duties."

He did not state what these duties were, but the boys felt that he must be either a banker or a broker, to be able to leave his work for an entire summer on a stretch, and they secretly envied him his ease.

Soon they were seated on the verandah, their coats having been taken by Hoki, an intelligent looking little Jap, dressed in a white suit. The Jap then brought two tables which he placed in front of the boys. Then they could hear him cracking ice somewhere in the rear of the building, and presently he emerged with a mammoth pitcher of lemonade.

"I knew you boys must be thirsty," said Mr Lawrence, "hence told Hoki to find the largest pitcher in the house. You see, I was a boy once myself."

The boys began to like Mr. Lawrence from the start, and as for the cooling beverage brought by Hoki, nothing would have been more welcome. Soon they found themselves feeling comfortable not only from a physical standpoint, but thoroughly at ease at Winnsocket Lodge, and wishing that some trick of fate would cause Mr. Lawrence to rent them the premises for the time of their stay.

As if divining what was passing in their minds, after a moment's silence, in which he appeared to be debating something to himself, Mr. Lawrence said:

"I find it imperative that I take a short journey, probably leaving to-morrow. I had intended leaving Hoki in charge of Winnsocket Lodge, but I am inclined to believe that I could not do better than leave it in the hands of you boys."

The Comrades and their chums exchanged glances of mingled joy and amazement, and Mr. Lawrence, stopping only to take a couple of draws from his cigar, continued:

"I may be gone two or three days; the time may stretch into two or three weeks. I am going on special business, and it is impossible to say just when I can accomplish what I desire. The lodge is well stocked with provisions, and Hoki is a fine servant. He will obey you as implicitly as he does me if I say the word."

"But, Mr. Lawrence," said Chot, "I feel that we should protest against your kind offer. We don't want to take advantage of your hospitality. We would rather rent—"

"That's just it; you boys want to rent the lodge, but the lodge is not for rent. You are simply a fine lot of young fellows, athletes everyone, I imagine, and I am very fond of young men. I trust you thoroughly, and I ask you to stay at Winnsocket Lodge until my return—to stay as my guests, taking care of my property, at the same time going where you please, when you please, in search of such amusement as you may desire. The rent you boys could afford would be nothing to me. I say to you, frankly, that the money would not be of the slightest use, as I now have all I can care for with any peace of mind."

"Since you put it in that light, and speaking for us all, sir," said Chot, "I will say that we accept your kind offer, and will show you that we can take the very best care of your property while you are away."

"I have no doubt of that. You will find plenty of sleeping accommodations both downstairs and up. I frequently have house parties here, and I provided sufficient room for everyone when I built the lodge."

And it was to these rooms that the boys were shown that night, after they had been taken through the lodge by their host. The lodge was constructed after expensive plans, mostly of rough wood, but solid and substantial, and with interior fittings that might have gone well in a Boston brownstone front. There were six rooms below—a living room, a dining room, a kitchen and three bedrooms, with a bath in a convenient spot to each of the latter. Upstairs there were a large

bedroom, a smaller bedroom and a large compartment used as a plunder-room, in which fishing nets, tackle, hunting apparatus and many other things were stored. The house was fitted with electric lights, generated, Mr. Lawrence told them, by a small dynamo in the cellar, or basement.

Expressing a curiosity to see this, the boys were taken below by their host. The basement, built entirely of stone, was damp and cool. In one end a small dynamo-room had been partitioned off, and in this was the dynamo and batteries that served to light the lodge in such a brilliant fashion.

The cellar contained several barrels of wine—or, so the boys judged from their appearance—countless jars of fine fruit, packed away on shelves, as well as many other things that demanded a cool place for safe keeping. Mr. Lawrence was, indeed, well supplied for a summer's outing.

The boys were curious to know more about him, but he did not volunteer any further information, and they were too well bred to appear at all inquisitive.

Tom and Chot were given the bedroom just to the rear of the one occupied by Mr. Lawrence, with Bert occupying a bedroom still farther back. Fleet and Pod were taken to the large chamber upstairs, and Hoki occupied the little one next to it.

With this arrangement, the boys retired, ignorant of the deep mysteries connected with Winnsocket Lodge, as well as of the many thrilling adventures which were to befall them before they took their departure.

The first inkling that there were mysterious doings in the lodge came to Chot and Tom when, upon awaking almost simultaneously in the middle of the night, they heard a low, scraping sound from the direction of Mr. Lawrence's chamber. It ceased after a moment, was again renewed, then ceased again.

"That was a strange noise," said Tom, in a whisper. "I wonder what it can be?"

"You can search me," was Chot's reply, also in a whisper. "It might be taken for a dozen different things."

"What, for instance?"

"Well, I don't believe I'd know just how to guess. It may be in Mr. Lawrence's room, and again it may have come from the basement."

"You're right," said Tom. "I hadn't thought of the basement."

"Well, it's stopped, anyway. I don't suppose anyone is going to carry us off."

"No; but let me be sure the door leading into the hall is locked. It's best to take no chances."

Tom tip-toed softly to the door and tried the lock. The boys had fastened the door before going to bed, and Tom found that, apparently, it had not been disturbed. Then going to the windows which looked out over the island to the east, Tom peered into the night. The windows were up, as both boys were great

believers in fresh air.

The lodge stood on stilts, as it were, and Tom knew that it was at least seven feet from the ground to the window sill. No chance for anyone to enter the house that way, unless aided by another, or by means of a ladder.

As Tom listened there was not a sound save for the faint stirring of the trees. The breeze had about died out. Off to the left Tom could see several lights glistening across the river, and far in the distance a bright, white glare in the sky marked the location of Rockport.

After a moment he came to bed again. For some time the boys lay awake discussing the strange noises in low tones, but finally fell asleep again.

Sometime later they were again wakened, this time by the same scraping sound as before. It continued for an even longer period, but finally ceased altogether.

A feeling of vague uneasiness began to steal over the boys. Try as they might, they could think of no solution of the sound. There were no animals of any sort on the island, they knew, so the noise must come from some human agency. But just what they were unable to determine to their satisfaction.

After discussing the matter in low tones for a time, they were ready to have another try at sleeping, when a noise from without caused them to tip-toe to the windows with suppressed excitement.

Here they listened intently. A conglomeration of small sounds came to them, but they were unable to distinguish any certain ones, until, finally, they heard the chug-chug of a motor-boat. The sounds grew more frequent but of less volume, and they decided that the little craft must be moving away from the island.

The sound died away entirely as the motor-boat apparently lost herself among the little islands surrounding the one on which stood Winnsocket Lodge.

Chot and Tom grew wide awake speculating over the matter, with the result that there was little sleep for them during the remainder of the night. They decided that it must have been in the neighborhood of three o'clock when they heard the motor-boat leave the island, for some two hours later it began to grow light, and soon the sun peeped over the islands to the east.

When they arose they found Hoki in the kitchen preparing breakfast. He grinned and nodded a Cheerful, "Good morning to you, sirs," in his quaint, broken English.

"Good morning, Hoki," said Chot. "That coffee smells mighty fine."

"Glad you like," was the Jap's response. "I take pleasure in making the service for you, sirs."

"He means it's a pleasure to serve us," said Chot, as a look of perplexity stole over Tom's face.

Hoki grinned and nodded at this.

As they were talking to Hoki, Bert came out of a nearby room, rubbing his eyes, and a moment later Fleet and Pod came downstairs, feeling fine after a morning plunge in the tub.

Hoki bustled back and forth between the kitchen and the diningroom, and soon announced breakfast.

"But we're to wait for Mr. Lawrence, of course," said Chot.

"No wait," said Hoki, gravely. "It gives me greatest pleasure to accept you as masters of lodge. My master, he not here—he go away in the night!"

CHAPTER XVII—MYSTERY

"Mr. Lawrence has left the island!" Chot exclaimed, and again Hoki nodded.

"He said tell young gentlemens take much possession, and he will either return or come back before long," said the Jap, gravely.

In spite of the fact that they were surprised at the sudden turn of events, the boys were forced to laugh at Hoki's quaint methods of speech.

"I understood he was not to go away until to-day," said Chot.

Hoki shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"I hesitate to express myself," he said; "at same time, must have been to-day when he left, sirs, for clock had some time past chimed midnight."

"That's so," said Tom. "It must have been three o'clock at least when we were up the last time. Er—Hoki, did your master leave in a motor-boat?"

"I am pleased to explain to you that he did," was the Jap's reply.

"I heard that boat," said Fleet. "The chug-chug of the engine woke me up. I don't know what time it was but it must have been getting on toward morning."

Then Fleet caught a significant look from Chot, and said no more.

Breakfast was eaten in silence, save for desultory comment on what they were going to do during the day. There was plenty of fishing tackle in the lodge, they knew, and Fleet and Pod decided that they would try and land some of the denizens of the St. Lawrence.

"Hoki, can you go fishing with us?" Fleet asked, as the Jap come into the diningroom again, bearing a large platter of pan-cakes.

"I will take pleasure in accepting of kind request," said he. "I be fine fisherman—sometimes," and he grinned broadly.

Tom and Chot decided to paddle around the island in their canoes, while Bert elected to stay at the lodge and read, as Mr. Lawrence's library held forth great temptations.

"I've had enough paddling for sometime," he said, "and I'm going to take it easy for a day or so."

That is the way matters were arranged for the day's pleasure, and about nine o'clock, Pod and Fleet, having selected what tackle they needed from Mr. Lawrence's plunder room, went off to the other end of the little island, about a hundred yards distant from the lodge. Hoki went with them.

Chot and Tom got into their canoes and paddled along the shore in the shade of the trees, taking care to keep within easy distance of the lodge.

The last the boys saw of Bert he was stretched out in a hammock on the shady side of the verandah, with one of Victor Hugo's volumes in his hand.

Finally, having paddled around to the end of the island, and teased Fleet and Pod because, as yet, no fish had taken their hooks, Chot and Tom decided to cross the intervening space of a quarter of a mile to another island, which looked cool and inviting with its massive shade trees and short, green grass.

As they went they glanced up at the lodge and saw Bert still in the hammock; but one hand was extended over the side now, and in this he held the book.

"Asleep!" said Chot, and Tom nodded, smiling.

"It's drowsy weather. He'd have felt much better to have come with us."

"Well, he didn't think so, and everyone to his own taste," Chot replied.

Reaching their destination, the boys drew their canoes up on the bank and lay down on the soft grass. They had a plain view of the front of Winnsocket Lodge, as well as of the boys fishing on the end of the island.

"This wouldn't be a bad spot for a camp," said Chot, as he let his glance roam around. "If Mr. Lawrence returns before we are ready to leave the islands, we can come over here and pitch our tent."

"That's a good plan," said Tom. "It would surely be comfortable out in the open here."

"Say, it's funny, isn't it?" mused Chot.

"I don't see anything funny."

"Well, queer, then."

"What's queer?"

"Why, the way Mr. Lawrence left the lodge?"

"In the motor-boat, you mean?"

"Not that so much, but why didn't he wait till daylight?"

"I couldn't say, Chot; it's too much of a problem for me. What were the

noises in the night? Had Mr. Lawrence anything to do with them? What this and what that? One might go on asking questions forever, but finding the answers is another matter."

"Well, he must have had urgent reasons for leaving at that time of night. No man wants to have his sleep disturbed to take a journey that can just as well be taken by daylight."

"Then I suppose this was a journey that couldn't be taken by daylight."

They were still discussing the matter of their host's disappearance, and the strange noises of the night, when they were startled by a yell from Bert, and turning their gaze in the direction of the lodge, saw him start up from the hammock and stand for an instant in a listening attitude. Then, looking over toward them, he beckoned to them in such a vigorous way that they knew he meant come at once. As they pushed their canoes into the water and jumped aboard, they saw him dash madly into the lodge.

Fleet, Pod and Hoki had heard the cry, and dropping their fishing tackle, they, too, rushed toward the lodge Pod leading by several lengths.

"Something wrong, sure," said Chot, between clenched teeth. "A little faster, Tom; we may be needed."

The other boys reached the lodge first and disappeared within just as Chot and Tom were pulling their canoes up on the island. When they had negotiated the slight rise and entered the building, there was no one to be seen.

Fleet came perspiring out of the basement a moment later, followed by Pod and Hoki. Their faces were white and they were shaking in every limb.

"What's the matter?" Chot demanded, seizing Fleet's arm and shaking him violently.

"It's—it's Bert," was the reply.

"Well, what about him? Where is he?"

"We don't know; we can't find him. Did you hear him cry out?"

"Yes; and we came as quickly as we could. He must be in the lodge."

"No," said Pod, firmly; "he isn't. We've searched it from top to bottom."

"Well, you searched too hurriedly then. Come, Tom; let's see if we can find the meaning of all this."

"Surely; he's bound to be here. Let's go into the basement first."

"All right. Are the lights on below, Hoki?"

"Yes, sirs; all on," was the Jap's reply. "We find them on when we return to lodge."

"You found them on?" Chot exclaimed.

"Yes, sirs."

"Shows, then, that Bert went below. Come on, Tom. You other fellows can come or not, as you chose."

"No, no," said Hoki, with a shudder. "I not care to go—I know—I know! You go, sirs; Hoki stay behind."

The boys exchanged glances. The Jap was visibly frightened, and it occurred to Chot and Tom that perhaps he knew more about Winnsocket Lodge than he cared to tell.

"I'll go with you," said Pod.

"Well, you stay with Hoki, Fleet," said Chot, winking significantly, and the fleshy lad nodded. He knew that wink; it meant, "And watch him, too."

It was as Hoki had said; the lights were all on in the basement. They were controlled by a little button at the head of the basement stairs, and Bert, if he had rushed suddenly below, could easily have turned it. Either this was what had happened, or it had been turned on by other parties before Bert entered the lodge.

The boys could not prevent a creepy sensation from possessing them, as they moved slowly down the stairs into the big cellar. A breath of cool air met their nostrils as they reached the foot of the steps and glanced about them.

"Bert—oh, Bert!" Chot called. His voice echoed and re-echoed through the place, but there was no response.

"That strange," said Tom.

They explored the cellar from one end to the other, but no trace of their missing chum was found. They searched diligently for a secret door, though where it could possibly have led had they found it, they could not imagine.

"Well, there's no use staying down here any longer," said Chot. "Bert has disappeared, that's all, and, very likely, of his own free will."

"I don't know about that," said Pod, with a dubious shake of the head.

"Well, I don't see what could have happened to him," said Tom.

"There's no way to tell what has happened unless we can first decide just why he cried out, then dashed so hurriedly inside," said Chot. "He was excited—that we know—and the most natural surmise is that he heard someone rummaging about the basement."

They returned to the first floor of the lodge, and found Fleet and Hoki eagerly awaiting them. From the expression on Fleet's face they knew that nothing unusual had happened while they were below.

The top story was then gone over, with the same result. Either through his own volition or by some means which the Comrades were unable at present to fathom, Bert Creighton had mysteriously disappeared.

"I knew you wouldn't find him," said Fleet. "He's just gone—that's all—vanished into thin air. I don't know what we'll ever say to his folks."

"Oh, shut up with that sort of chatter," said Chot, severely. "You make me tired! Nothing serious has happened to Bert."

"Then where is he?" demanded Fleet, his voice quivering with suppressed

excitement.

"That's what we'll have to find out. We can't do it in a minute; we've no Sherlock Holmes among us. This much I know, though: No matter how unnatural this may seem, it has happened in a perfectly natural manner, and we'll find a way to solve it."

"Well, you've more confidence in your solving abilities than I have," said Fleet.

"You're scared—that's what's the matter with you."

"I'm not!"

"Oh, very well; deny it, if you want, but we'll draw our own conclusions, just the same."

Fleet subsided at this, and the boys seated themselves on the verandah to await lunch which Hoki said he would prepare at once.

The mystery of the lodge did not interfere with their appetites, and they continued to discuss Bert's disappearance as they ate. They tried to make some connection between the noises in the night, Mr. Lawrence's departure in the motor-boat, and the disappearance of their chum, but, try as they might, they could form no plausible connection.

They decided to leave the lodge no more until the mystery was solved, so they hung around all the afternoon, half-expecting Bert to make his appearance and explain away the things that perplexed them. But supper-time came, and no Bert.

At six they ate again, Hoki preparing a meal fit for a king. They were living off the fat of the land, so to speak, and had Bert been with them, they would have been perfectly happy.

After dinner they sat on the verandah and watched it grow dark—not without a feeling of dread, though, it must be admitted. All sorts of things might happen in the lodge under cover of darkness. They knew not what to be prepared for, but something seemed to tell them that above all places, the basement was the one spot to keep their eyes on.

"Hoki," said Chot, suddenly, when the Jap had finished the kitchen work and joined them on the verandah, "are there any guns about the place?"

"Oh, yes, sirs; as many as six, sirs. Would you have them delivered?"

"Where are they kept?"

"In my master's private chamber, if you please, sirs."

"Then lead the way to them, Hoki. Come, Tom! The rest of you stay here till we return."

They followed the Jap into the lodge, and, true to his word, Hoki found a case containing six revolvers in Mr. Lawrence's apartment.

The boys appropriated them all, loading them carefully, and placed an extra

supply of cartridges in their pockets. Tom and Chot took two revolvers each, dividing the other two with Fleet and Pod, together with cartridges and orders to keep the weapons handy for instant use.

The revolvers gave the boys a certain feeling of security that had been absent before, and they were just settling comfortably down on the verandah when they were startled by a voice from the river. Somewhere between Winnsocket Lodge and the island to the south a man or boy was in deep trouble. They could tell that from the mournful tones which reached them.

"Help, help!" said the voice. "Come quick! Help, help!"

CHAPTER XVIII—THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

"It must be Bert!" cried Fleet.

"I don't know," said Chot. "I wish we had a light. I expect we'd better make for the canoes."

"Help, help!" came the cry again, this time fainter than before.

"Wait," said Hoki.

He dashed into the lodge and turned a button that flooded the gallery with light. Then the boys saw him spring to a small contrivance on one end of the verandah, and which until now had passed unnoticed by them.

The next instant they knew it was a small searchlight, for a streak of white light shot suddenly out on to the river, moved here and there under Hoki's skillful manipulation, then settled down upon a spot where the figure of a man or boy could be seen clinging to the bottom of an upturned skiff.

"Now, go," said Hoki. "I wait by light."

"And I'll stay with you," said Fleet, and Chot nodded a vigorous assent.

Chot, Tom and Pod ran quickly down to the bank where they had left their canoes, and pushing them into the water, paddled rapidly in the direction of the light.

"That doesn't look like Bert," said Tom.

"Help, fellows—I'm all in," said the voice again, and there was something strangely familiar about it.

"That doesn't look like Bert," said Tom, again, "and it isn't Bert."

"No; it's—it's Truem Wright!" cried Chot, as the canoes drew closer.

"It's Truem all right," growled that person.

"Well, what do you think of that?" cried Pod.

"I don't think much of it," said Truem. "I'm glad I've found you fellows. Been searching for you the whole afternoon. But help me out of this—this water's pretty cool for an evening bath."

Chot and Tom, one on either side, steadied Pod's canoe until Truem could crawl in. Then Chot secured the painter of the upturned skiff and the canoes started for the landing again, Chot towing Truem's upturned boat.

The boys were curious to know what had happened to Truem, but decided not to question him until he had been supplied with dry clothes.

Hoki turned off the searchlight as the boys climbed the steps leading to the verandah, and came forward to see if he could be of assistance.

Truem shook hands with Fleet, as Chot turned to the Jap.

"You might find a suit of old clothes, some underwear and anything that's handy, Hoki," said Chot.

"I find plenty," was the Jap's reply. "You wait."

They heard him rummaging in Mr. Lawrence's room and finally he emerged with all the necessary articles. Chot and Tom then took Truem into their room where, when he had stripped, they rubbed him with a rough towel until his skin fairly shone.

A little later, when the boys were again on the verandah, Truem told his story.

"I arrived at Clayton on the New York side, yesterday morning," he said. "Of course, I had no idea where you fellows were, so one place was as good as another to make a start from—in fact, I've had better luck finding you than I thought I should. I took a little passenger launch from Clayton over to Wellesley Island. The launch only went as far as Westminster Park, however, so I bargained with a boatman for a skiff. He wouldn't rent to a stranger, so I bought it outright.

"That was yesterday afternoon. I spent the night on a little island where a party was camping. They generously shared what they had with me and gave me a place to sleep. I told them I was hunting you fellows, and that you would probably be in one of the most secluded parts of the river, so they directed me this way. I rowed in and out around the islands all day until about an hour ago, when I caught sight of the roof of this lodge. Well, I was two miles away, and it was growing dusk. I wondered if I'd be able to keep a course for the place. Then your lights came on and I steered my course by that.

"As I passed that island to the north of you, I heard men talking in low tones, and thought once I'd stop and ask who lived over here. But I decided to keep on, for the men, whoever they were, had no lights out, and I didn't like to stop without knowing something about whom I was going to meet. So I started around the east end of this island, judging from the lights where the front of the building was, and as I lay off the island out there wondering where I'd better land, I heard some sort of a boat coming toward me in the dark. It was a big rowboat. She had no lights out; neither had I. Well, she hit me, bowling me over in a hurry. There were three men in her, I believe. I heard a low laugh as she swept by and was lost in the darkness. Then, I shouted for help."

"In what direction was the other boat going, Truem?" asked Chot.

"I should say that she was heading around the east point there toward the north island. The oars were muffled, and she came upon me before I knew it."

"That sounds rather suspicious," said Tom. "Muffled oars and no lights. That's in strict disobedience to the navigation laws, I am sure. Looks like there's something shady going on around here."

"Sh!" cried Chot. He looked quickly around to see if the Jap was in earshot. But Hoki was in the kitchen preparing some lunch for Truem, and could not hear.

Then, in low tones, the boys told Truem of their adventures since arriving at Winnsocket Lodge, ending with the disappearance of Bert.

"That's the strangest part of all—how Bert could disappear so mysteriously," said Truem. "Are you sure there's not some sort of a secret door in the cellar?"

"We've been over every corner of it," said Chot.

"Well, we'd better go over it again by daylight."

"We will. What bothers me is why Bert ran into the lodge so quickly. Something must have startled him into action, for he motioned to us to come and disappeared inside like a flash."

"Well, it's too deep for me," said Fleet. "I'm afraid something has happened to him."

"And I'm afraid to go to bed to-night," said Pod.

"That suggests to me that it will be a good plan to sit up, two at a time, and watch," said Chot.

"Including Hoki?" inquired Tom.

"Yes; I'll take the Jap as my partner. We'll stand the first watch till twelve; then Tom and Pod can take it up till three, and Truem and Fleet can watch from three till daylight."

"That's a good plan," said Tom. "If there's anything going on around here—and we are positive that there is—we'd best find out about it as soon as we can. We don't want to spoil our vacation. Who knows, to-night some of us may get a clue to Bert's disappearance."

While Truem was eating his lunch, Chot explained matters to Hoki, and asked the Jap to stand the first watch with him.

"Oh, sirs," he said, trembling as he surveyed them, "it is better that all go to bed and peacefully slumber. May be if you sit up you will great dissatisfaction have, perhaps danger, before morning."

"Look here, Hoki," said Chot, sternly. "What do you know about this lodge?"

"Oh, nothing, sirs; I request that you belief have."

"Well, there are some mighty strange things going on in this vicinity. One of our number has mysteriously disappeared—before our eyes, you might say. Don't you think you could make a pretty good guess as to what has become of him?"

"Don't me ask, sirs," replied Hoki. "See, I prostrate my bended knees on the carpet you before that you believe me when I say I nothing know."

The Jap spoke earnestly, as he fell into a kneeling posture in front of Chot.

"Get up, Hoki," commanded Chot. "There is no need to kneel. We'll take your word for it."

But it was easily apparent that Hoki knew more than he would tell. He was afraid, no doubt, of Mr. Lawrence. Beg and plead with him as they might during the rest of the evening, he maintained the strictest secrecy. Anything he knew of the lodge—anything of the mysterious happenings of the previous day and night—would remain locked within his breast. Hoki was at least faithful to his master, and the boys admired him for it.

"Well, we won't ask you anything more, Hoki," said Chot, finally.

"I thanks make, sir."

"But you must stand watch with me till midnight."

"Oh, no, sir; I protest that—"

"Protesting will do no good. If we agree not to question you, you must, in turn, agree to aid us all you can without betraying your master."

The Jap said nothing more, but wandered around with a scared look on his face. From the top to the bottom of the house, he went, now pacing restlessly up and down the big hall, now climbing the stairs to the upper floor, then down again and on to the verandah.

"I'm afraid Hoki will bear watching," said Chot, who had been observing his movements.

"I don't believe he'd attempt any violence," said Tom.

"No; on the contrary, I believe he likes us and would be glad to help us. But something frightens him and makes him hold his tongue. Mr. Lawrence, for instance, may have sworn him to secrecy on some sacred Japanese oath, which Hoki would rather die than break. I have heard of such things."

"If he'd only tell us what he knows of Bert's disappearance, I wouldn't ask him a thing about his master," said Fleet.

"No; I'd be willing to take Bert and quit the lodge," said Pod.

"Not I," said Chot "This mystery has aroused my curiosity, and I mean to see the bottom of it before I stir off the island. No matter how strange things may seem, there is a plausible explanation for everything and we've got to find it."

"Chot is right," said Truem; "there's nothing supernatural about this. Someone is working a mighty clever scheme—that's all. I, like Chot, want to get at the bottom of it."

"And I," said Tom.

"Oh, you fellows needn't think Pod and I are going to leave you in the lurch," said Fleet. "We're in the thing till the finish, even if it's our finish too."

"We know that," said Chot. "You fellows who are to stand the later watches had better get some sleep. It's nine-thirty. I'll corral Hoki and try and cure him of his nervousness. Then I'll put out the lights and see if I can discover any deep, dark mysteries!"

Pod shuddered slightly at Chot's words, but Chot laughed.

"Of course you fellows will sleep in the downstairs room, so as to be handy if I want you," he said. "If you hear the sound of a scuffle or a revolver shot, you'll know there's something doing."

So the other boys went off to bed, Tom and Pod taking the room occupied the previous night by Chot and Tom, and Truem and Fleet using the one occupied by Bert.

"Here, Hoki," said Chot. "Come out and sit down."

The Jap came silently on to the verandah. He did not seem inclined to talk, and Chot decided not to force the conversation. He preferred to be silent, anyway, that his ear might catch any unusual sound either in or out of the lodge.

The evening passed without incident until nearly twelve, and Chot arose with a yawn to awaken Tom and Pod, when, as he stepped into the hall, he heard a faint cry coming apparently from the basement. He listened intently. The voice was that of Bert Creighton, and it sounded miles away.

"Chot! Tom! Help!" it said. "I'm caught—I'm caught! Help! Help!"

Chot lost no time in acting; springing quickly to the room occupied by Tom and Pod, he threw open the door and cried out for them to get up. Then, turning on the lights in the hall, he hurried toward the door leading into the basement, while Hoki, in apparent terror, crouched on the stairway leading above.

CHAPTER XIX—IMPORTANT DISCOVERIES

Tremblingly Chot Duncan paused on the stairs leading into the basement of the lodge, one hand on the electric button, the other holding a revolver. Bert Creighton's appealing cry was still ringing in his ears, and he knew not what would be disclosed when the basement was flooded with light.

Then, as he heard Tom and Pod tumbling out of bed behind him, he gave the button a twist, and a yellow glow quickly banished the darkness.

Chot stood, amazement written on every line of his features, for the basement was empty—there was not a sound to be heard; not a soul to be seen.

Still holding his weapon in readiness for use, Chot advanced cautiously down the stairs.

"What's the matter?" he heard Tom ask, as he and Pod started into the basement.

Truem and Fleet could be heard slipping on their shoes, and Chot felt decidedly relieved when they, also, came down the basement steps.

A thorough search was made, no one speaking a word for the space of several moments. Then Chot broke the silence:

"I heard Bert Creighton's voice calling for help. I'd know it anywhere. It came from the basement, but sounded at a distance, as if he might be concealed somewhere and unable to get out."

"Then let's make a more thorough search," said Truem. "There is some secret about Winnsocket Lodge of which we are in ignorance."

"Must be a secret room down here somewhere," said Tom. "I can offer no other solution."

"Well, perhaps you'll be kind enough to show us where it is," said Fleet.

"It may be worked by a spring in the wall," Tom earnestly replied. "I know that sounds like a fairy tale, but such things exist even to-day in some of the

old colonial mansions of Canada, so why shouldn't a clever man like this Mr. Lawrence adopt the scheme if it served his ends?"

"Well, we'll make a search, anyway," said Chot.

Then each took a section of the basement wall and the investigation began. They felt carefully over every inch of surface, even taking the fruit jars off the shelves and peering intently behind them. Luckily the lights were so arranged as to be moveable to almost any part of the basement, and shadows were quickly dispelled whenever the boys desired.

"Hello, what's this?" said Chot suddenly.

Instantly every boy stopped searching and rushed to his side, knowing from the tone in which he spoke that he had made an important discovery.

Chot had worked his way around on his section of the wall until he was beneath the stairs. Here, in a little nook, carefully concealed from the eyes of any who were not making a most thorough search, was a small metal tube projecting several inches from the wall, attached to which was a rubber tube of the same dimensions.

"Sh!" said Chot, as the others gathered about him. "This is a speaking tube, though where it leads I haven't the slightest idea."

He put his ear to the end of the tube, and greatly to his surprise, he heard voices.

"Hold still, boys, and I believe our mystery will be a mystery no longer," he said, in a low tone. "I hear people talking. Let me see if I can catch what they say."

The voices were evidently some little distance from the other end of the tube but as absolute silence reigned in the basement, Chot could, by straining, catch nearly every word.

"I tell you I will get to that speaking tube," he heard Bert Creighton say.

There were several exclamations of anger at this, and the sound of a scuffle. Then Chot caught the magic words that unfolded to him at least one of the many mysteries that had been perplexing the boys since their arrival at Winnsocket Lodge.

"You think I don't know your schemes, but I do," Bert went on, "and I'm going to inform the authorities on you the first chance I get. You know what the government will do to smugglers."

"Smugglers!" muttered Chot. "Ah!"

"Of course, we know what they'll do if they catch us," said another voice. "But you'll never have a chance to inform on us. It was only by accident that you ever heard us in the basement of the lodge, and even then, if you had been sensible enough not to investigate, you would now be safe with your friends. As it is, you're in a pretty bad fix."

"I'll appeal to Mr. Lawrence when he returns."

"Well, what do you think he'll do? Don't you suppose he's as heavily involved in this business as we?"

"He's involved more than we," growled another voice.

"Well you fellows see that the kid doesn't get to the speaking tube again. His friends are probably asleep, but because they didn't hear his first cry is no sign another wouldn't wake them. We've got trouble enough without ever letting them know this island is inhabited."

"I don't see what the boss ever let the kids stay in the lodge for in the first place. He's always taking desperate chances," said one of the others.

"Well, he's never been caught yet."

"No; but he will be," came in the tones of Bert.

Then the voices moved out of range and all was still. Quickly Chot repeated to the other boys what he had heard.

"Bert's cry," he said, "must have come through the tube. No wonder it sounded distant."

"The mystery, then, is a mystery no longer," said Truem.

"I see you are thinking of the same thing as I," said Chot. "The smugglers have a rendezvous on the island to the north, and that is where they are holding Bert captive."

"Yes," said Truem, "and those are the voices I heard the other night, and it was the smugglers' boat, very likely, which capsized my skiff."

"And it is evident from the conversation Chot heard that our friend, Mr. Lawrence, is the leader of the band," said Tom. "That I think, is to me the most surprising of all."

"Yet, it is no doubt true," said Chot. "You will remember reading in the papers some time ago how different articles were mysteriously brought across the Canadian border, and how the revenue officers were perplexed and had failed to apprehend the smugglers. Well, the officers have simply not had the opportunities for investigation that we have had, that's all."

"Then the launch we heard the other night was taking smuggled articles to the other island?" said Pod.

"No," said Chot; "the launch was either bringing smuggled articles from the other island to the lodge, or taking them from the lodge to some point in the United States. There's very little stuff taken from the United States into Canada, strange to say. The contraband stuff all comes the other way."

"There's one thing we haven't found out yet," said Fleet. "How do they get the stuff into the lodge?"

"By some secret tunnel surely. There must be a compartment to the basement of which we are still in ignorance, as Truem said a while ago, in spite of the fact that we believe we have been over every inch of space."

"Then the best thing to do, seems to me," said Tom, "is to search for an opening of some sort on the north side of this island."

"That will be our plan," said Chot.

"And Bert's capture is not so much of a mystery now," said Truem. "He evidently heard the smugglers rummaging in the cellar, knew he was about to make a discovery of some sort, motioned you fellows to come, and went to investigate. Then the smugglers captured him, and took him out through the secret passage before any of you could reach the lodge. They may have stayed in the tunnel until the excitement simmered down—who knows?"

"Well, I believe we have the advantage of them now," said Chot. "We know their secret. They do not know we know it, and we are thus better prepared to take action to get Bert out of their clutches and hand the smugglers over to justice."

"I wonder if Mr. Lawrence is on the other island?" said Fleet.

"If you want my opinion," said Chot, "Mr. Lawrence went off the other night with a launch full of smuggled goods. The scraping sounds Tom and I heard in the night were evidently caused by the removal of cases of some sort that had been brought to the lodge from the north island, and I believe Mr. Lawrence went with them to some secret nook where he can safely land the goods on the New York shore."

"But why should he want to bring them to the lodge before taking them to this other rendezvous?" Pod queried.

"There is only one way in which I can explain that," said Chot. "The boundary line between the United States and Canada must run between these two islands. Thus, while the island to the north is in Canada, Winnsocket Lodge is in the United States, and once goods are brought here they have been carried over the first and most dangerous stage of their journey."

"What do you think they smuggle?"

"A little of everything, perhaps, but I should say mostly valuable laces and precious stones, including diamonds, of course, brought into Canada through Labrador or some other secluded spot."

"No wonder Mr. Lawrence told us that the money we could pay him for the rent of the lodge would be of no use," said Fleet.

"But we're forgetting Hoki," said Truem. "I hope he hasn't deserted us in the excitement."

They immediately went upstairs, intending to plan out a course of action before morning, as they did not want to leave Bert in the enemy's hands any longer than was absolutely necessary.

They found Hoki still crouching at the foot of the staircase when they reached the first floor. The Jap's eyes were fairly bulging with terror. At the sight of the boys he cried out to them not to hurt him.

It look Chot some time to convince the Jap that they intended him no bodily harm, and when he finally succeeded in winning him over the boys knew they had won a warm friend. Chot explained to Hoki that Mr. Lawrence would eventually be apprehended by the authorities, and that unless Hoki was prepared to ally himself with them, he would be arrested with the other smugglers.

Once the Jap had made up his mind to do a certain thing, nothing could turn him from it. All he asked, he told Chot, was protection from Mr. Lawrence if he became angry, and this the boys gladly promised. Hoki knew of the smuggling, but had been sworn to secrecy by his master. He knew none of the details he told them, except that the men had a secret way of getting into the lodge.

The boys did not try to sleep any more that night, fearing another appeal for help from Bert, and they sat on the verandah until daylight broke grayly over the islands. At sun-up Hoki served them with coffee and cakes, and they ate ravenously, for the little Jap's cooking suited their tastes to perfection.

During the early morning they mapped out a plan of action. It was a certainty, they felt, that the smugglers would soon enter the lodge again, believing the boys to be in ignorance of their secret. The tunnel must be on the shore towards the other island, and while the boys did not care to make a search for it in broad daylight, as the shore was in plain view from the smugglers' retreat, they felt that they could pretty nearly guess its location.

Truem, then was to watch the shore end of the passage every night until the smugglers entered it, then find a means to close it behind them, so their only mode of exit would be through the basement of the lodge. This sounded like a big undertaking, but Truem volunteered for the task. He was to be armed with a revolver and a good supply of cartridges.

Tom, Fleet and Pod were to keep watch in the basement of the lodge, also heavily armed, prepared to take the smugglers by surprise should they reveal their mode of entrance.

While this was taking place Chot and Hoki were to go in Fleet's big canoe to the north island, there to find and liberate Bert, overpowering his guards if need be, and returning to the lodge in time to be of assistance to Truem or the boys in the basement, as the exigencies of the case might demand.

Every boy was determined, knowing that if he did his share the smugglers would be captured. Then there would be but two things left to do to make the job complete—the notifying of the United States authorities, and the capture of Mr. Lawrence on his return to the lodge.

What bothered the boys was the fact that Mr. Lawrence had taken them into the lodge and left them in charge during his absence. They could find no plausible reason for his action, but felt that this, like everything else connected with the plans of the smugglers, would be revealed in time.

So, with their plans thoroughly mapped out, the boys took turns sleeping through the afternoon and early evening, and at night prepared to play their respective parts in the little drama should the smugglers again enter the secret passage leading to the lodge.

CHAPTER XX—A CAPTURE

Though the boys kept a vigilant watch all through the night, nothing occurred to disturb the tranquility of Winnsocket Lodge. Truem sat on the shore, hoping the smugglers would enter the secret passage, but not a boat of any description came near the island. He felt at times an almost uncontrollable desire to search for the passage anyway, as that shore of the island was covered with rocks and trailing vines, any of which might hide the entrance. But to successfully prosecute his search he would need a light, and this might arouse the suspicion of the smugglers.

In the meantime, Tom, Pod and Fleet sat on the basement steps, waiting a signal from Truem that the men were in the passage, or another message from Bert through the speaking tube. Bert, however, was being kept away from the tube, they felt sure, and would find no way of communicating with his chums again.

Chot and Hoki sat on the broad verandah, ready to dash at a moment's notice down to the river's edge, and enter Fleet's canoe.

In this way the night was passed. Hoki served breakfast at sun-up, and again the boys took turns sleeping, with a cold plunge in the bath-tub on awaking. By night they were in fine fettle again, and felt no effects from the loss of sleep the night before.

The same plan was followed again, the lights being extinguished early in the evening, the boys assuming the same positions, except that Pod was stationed at a small window in the back hall, looking out toward where Truem was keeping watch on the shore, as well as toward the north island.

About eleven-thirty Pod heard the soft splash of oars, mingled with the sound of voices, wafted indistinctly to him over the water.

"I think they're coming fellows!" he cried, dashing back to the stairway on which sat Tom and Fleet.

"What makes you think so?" queried Tom.

"I can hear voices and the splash of oars."

"Well, tell Chot and Hoki, then come back here with us."

Pod sprang to obey, and a moment later Chot and the Jap were moving silently down the slope toward the water's edge.

"We'll work silently around the end of the island, and may have an opportunity to help Truem," said Chot, in a whisper, and Hoki gave his hand a squeeze to signify that he understood.

In the meantime, let us see what Truem was doing. He had heard the first faint splash of oars, and he crouched low behind some shrubbery, trying to make out the form of the boat, which he knew was heading straight for Winnsocket Lodge. The splash of oars became louder, and voices more distinct, but as yet he could make out nothing in the darkness.

Finally, however, a dark object came indistinctly before his vision, and soon he could make out the outline of a big rowboat, moving almost directly toward him. As near as he could judge the boat had three occupants, but this was merely guesswork on his part, because in the uncertainty of the darkness, he saw at times more, and at times less.

But a few minutes elapsed before the boat was drawn up against the bank. Then Truem saw the forms of four men leap out. One of them held a painter with which he made the boat fast to a stake.

The smugglers stood talking in low tones for the space of a minute, though to the excited Truem it seemed a great deal longer. Then they moved up the shore a few yards, and disappeared, one after the other, behind two large rocks which were practically covered with shrubbery.

Just at this moment the canoe containing Chot and Hoki came softly around the end of the island. For a moment Truem was uncertain as to whether the new arrivals were friends or enemies. Then he recognized the outlines of Fleet's canoe, and a feeling of relief swept over him.

"Sh!" he called, in a low tone, as the canoe came up to the bank. "They've just entered the passage."

"Did you see where it was?" asked Chot.

"Yes."

"Did they leave a guard in their boat?"

"No."

"Wait a second, then. Hoki, you stay here. Sit still and hold the canoe to the bank, for I may come back in a hurry." Chot leaped ashore as he spoke. "Come on, Truem; show me where they went and perhaps I can help you bottle them up."

"This way," said Truem, as he moved silently up the shore to the point where he had seen the men disappear.

"Wait, now," said Chot. "I've got a little pocket light that I found in the lodge. I believe we'll be safe in using it."

But almost as he spoke both he and Truem observed something which caused them to stare in silent amazement. A crack of yellow light was to be seen among the vines, and pushing them aside, they saw a long, straight passage leading on a slight incline toward the lodge. On the ceiling was a row of lights which made the passageway almost as light as day.

"Well, what do you think of that?" cried Truem.

"Another illustration of the ingenuity of our friend, Mr. Lawrence," Chot replied.

"How are we going to block the passageway?" whispered Truem.

"I don't see any way to block it," said Chot; "there's no sign of a door, and it would take all night to fill it with rocks—and even then they could easily work their way out. I don't see anything to do, Truem, but follow them up the passageway and place them between two fires, and if the smugglers go as far as the basement, they'll find themselves covered by the revolvers of the boys. Coming in the nature of a surprise, that should accomplish the result we most desire. But should they escape and come back down the passageway, another surprise will be awaiting them, and we'll cover them from this end."

"What about Hoki?"

"Let him stay in the canoe. I shall probably go to the north island after this fracas is over."

Silently Chot and Truem stole up the passageway toward the house, admiring the construction of the place as they went. It was at least six feet in height, made entirely of concrete, and about fifty feet in length.

They could see the entire length of the passageway up to where it took a sharp turn, as they judged, directly under the lodge. The smugglers were nowhere in sight.

"They must have gone into a room of some sort, either next to or under the basement," whispered Chot.

This impression was confirmed a moment later when they came to a huge oak door which effectually blocked the passage.

"Why, this is just what we're looking for," said Truem. "See here, Chot; we can fasten this from the outside, and the smugglers can never get out unless they batter it down, and they won't try that if we let them know we're waiting out here for them."

"A good idea," said Chot. "Can you fasten it?"

Truem nodded and fastened the door by means of a massive hook. Then the boys sat down on the stone floor of the tunnel to await developments.

In the meantime, the boys in the basement were waiting expectantly for the

coming of the smugglers. They had seen Chot and Hoki leave the lodge, and knew the time was approaching for the capture they had planned.

What bothered them greatly, was the way the smugglers would enter the basement, and to guard against a surprise, they decided to separate; so Pod was stationed on the steps leading above in easy reach of the electric button, Fleet crouched in the corner near where the canned fruit was stored, and Tom in another corner back of the stairway and a few feet beyond the speaking tube.

The boys pictured in their minds a plan of the cellar and the relative positions of each other, then Tom gave the signal for lights out and Pod turned the button which flooded the cellar with darkness. On the cry, "Lights!" from Tom, he was to turn the button again, when the boys would cover the smugglers with their revolvers and demand their surrender.

Their plan thoroughly mapped out in this fashion, they became silent.

Some minutes passed before they had any sign of the approach of the smugglers. Then they heard the creaking of door hinges. Just where this door was located they could not determine, but it seemed beneath the basement. Then they could hear voices discussing something in low tones.

Then, suddenly, Tom heard a low, scraping sound almost at his side, where a large empty vinegar barrel had stood, and reaching out his hand to touch the barrel, he felt it move slowly upward!

There was, then, an opening in the floor of the basement, not the walls, which the barrel had at least partly concealed. He drew back against the wall, so that the smugglers would not brush against him in making their ascent into the basement.

"It's dark as pitch," he heard a voice say. "But I'll get a light. The kids are all asleep long ago. Bill, you make for the stairway and switch on the lights. We want to get out of this as soon as we can."

There was a grunted response to this, and the boys could hear the man called Bill tip-toeing toward the stairway. Pod and Fleet had heard the conversation, and knowing that they were prepared to act, when he heard the footfalls of the man, Bill, on the bottom step, Tom called quickly:

"Lights!"

Pod snapped the button, and instantly the basement was flooded with a yellow glow.

"Hands up!" cried the three boys in unison, as they covered the three men who appeared before them. The fourth man had been only partly through the trap-door when the lights came on, and he dropped quickly back, pulling the trap shut behind him.

Pod found himself covering the burly Bill, who had paused with one foot on the steps. Fleet took the man nearest him, evidently the leader of the little party,

and Tom covered the other man who was near the trap-door, and not more than four feet away from him.

For a few seconds, following the command of the boys, there was complete silence. It was broken by a laugh from the man whom Fleet was covering.

"Well, it looks like you'd made a good haul this time, kids," he said. "Just what can we do for you?"

"Stand right still until we tell you to move," said Fleet.

"This is a nice mess!" growled the fellow called Bill.

"A bloomin' bad one, say I," said the man Tom was covering, speaking with a slight accent that marked him at once for an Englishman.

"Sorry you gentlemen find yourselves in such a predicament," said Tom, "but there have been altogether too many mysteries about this lodge to suit us."

"What you going to do with us?" queried Bill.

"Never mind; you'll learn that soon enough. How many more are there of you?"

"There's six in the room below and four more in the passageway," said the leader, lying glibly. "So you'd better let us go, and take a sneak while you can. We'll get the best of you in the end."

"There's only one more in your party," said Tom, making a shrewd guess, "and I guess we'll find a way to get him."

"Oh, you won't get any of the others," said Bill. "They're out on the river by this time. Don't you s'pose we leave things clear for our escape when we come over here?"

"You are no doubt deluding yourselves into believing that your friend below will get safely back to the other island," said Tom, "but it happens that we have three of our boys at the other end of the tunnel, all heavily armed. Now, figure it out, if you can."

"And somebody's getting in his fine work," cried Fleet, as the dull sound of a revolver shot came to them from below.

CHAPTER XXI—AT BAY

Let us leave the boys in the cellar and see what Chot and Truem were doing in the passageway, as well as the cause of the revolver shot which had been audible to those above.

After closing the massive door and fastening it securely, Chot and Truem waited silently in the passageway for the developments they were sure would not be long in coming.

After a few minutes they heard sudden footsteps in the room beyond the door, then some one began rattling the door in a strenuous effort to get out. Of course, this was the fourth member of the smuggler quartet, who had escaped down the trap when Pod switched on the lights. But Chot and Truem, not knowing how their chums were faring in the basement, thought the entire band of smugglers was making an effort to escape.

So when the door began to tremble, Chot called in a loud tone:

"Stop, or I'll shoot you through the door!"

Evidently surprised at finding enemies in the passageway, as well as in the basement, the man inside ceased his efforts. But he said nothing, and after a short pause, Chot said again:

"Do you surrender?"

"Yes," came the voice from within.

"Well, we're going to open the door, and you're to come through with your hands in the air—and *empty*! Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"You agree?"

"Yes."

"All right; Truem, open the door just enough to let him through," said Chot, taking up a position half behind the door, his revolver ready for use.

Truem did as requested, and the form of a man came quickly through, and seeing Chot, leveled a revolver at him and fired.

But Truem had seen the move, and he knocked up the smuggler's arm. The

bullet whistled harmlessly against the ceiling of the passageway. Then the smuggler found that he had tackled more than he could handle, for both boys leaped on him, threw him quickly to the floor, and choked him into complete submission.

"I surrender," he cried faintly, as Chot's grip tightened on his throat.

"You told us that before, then tried treachery," said Truem. "Don't let go of him, Chot."

But such an appealing look came into the man's eyes that Chot, after taking his revolver, and feeling in his pockets for other weapons, released him and jumped to his feet.

The smuggler was dazed. His head had struck the stone floor with no gentle force, and he gasped slightly as he drew his lungs full of air.

"You've got me, all right," he said. "There ain't no more fight in me."

"Where are the others?"

"In the same fix, I guess. I was the last man through the trap, and just as I was about half way up, some feller switched on the lights and covered my three pals. Then I dropped back. I didn't know there was anyone on this end."

"The boys must have captured the other men," said Truem.

"Suppose you go to the trap and call while I watch our friend here," said Chot.

Truem nodded and sprang instantly away. He had no difficulty in finding the stairs leading above, and ascending part way, he called:

"Tom—oh, Tom!"

"Well, what is it?" Tom replied.

"It's Truem. Have you got the smugglers?"

"We have three of them."

"Well, Chot and I have the other man. There were only four."

"I knew you were lying to me," Truem heard Tom say to one of the men above. Then he called down to Truem:

"You fellows can bring your prisoner up through the trap."

"All right," shouted Truem; "we'll be there in just a minute."

He communicated Tom's request to Chot, and the latter marched his prisoner into the chamber. Then Truem pushed the trap-door open, and in this way the boys ascended into the basement of the lodge, revolvers ready for any emergency.

But they saw that their chums had indeed been successful in their capture of the other smugglers, Fleet having completely disarmed the men while Tom and Pod covered them. The smugglers were now huddled together in one corner, and the man brought up by Chot and Truem was placed among them.

"Now, to rescue Bert," said Chot.

"I s'pose that's your pal that we've got on the other island?" said the leader

of the smugglers.

"Yes."

"Well, you'll never get him, for there's ten men over there, and they'll be coming to see what's wrong with us in a few minutes."

"And they'll find out," said Tom. "But I don't believe your story of ten men. You told us a lie before, and the man who lies once will lie as often as the occasion demands."

"Leave it to me," said Chot, "and don't fail to keep a strict watch on these men. If I need you I'll let you know through the speaking tube."

"Let me know, anyway, when you get away with Bert," said Tom.

Chot nodded his head and descended quickly into the lower chamber. It was but the matter of a minute to run down the passageway to where Hoki was still sitting in the canoe.

"It's me, Hoki," said Chot. "Did you think I had deserted you?"

"No think so," replied the Jap. "You, sirs, must have had pretty much of a fine time."

Chot laughed and explained to Hoki what had happened. The Jap could hardly contain himself for joy, but became still at Chot's request, as, picking up a paddle, Chot sent the big canoe away from the shore, headed toward the north island.

Fearing that some of the smugglers' companions might be waiting on the shore for their comrades' return, Chot sent the canoe around to the side of the island.

Before landing he lay for the space of several minutes listening intently for some sign of the presence of other smugglers. But the island was dark and still, so making the canoe fast to a small tree on the shore, he and Hoki effected a landing, and stood considering the best method to accomplish the purpose for which they had come.

The island was heavily-wooded and presented many difficulties to Chot and the little Jap. They had no means of knowing any of the plans of the island, and were in complete ignorance as to the location of the smugglers' quarters.

But they had come for a purpose, and starting blindly ahead toward the center of the island, Chot softly told the Jap to follow.

They made very little noise, and held their revolvers ready for use.

Reaching the top of an incline, similar in many respects to the one on which stood Winnsocket Lodge, they paused perplexed. The island was not a large one, and Chot felt that they must be in close proximity to the smugglers' rendezvous.

"See!" whispered Hoki, suddenly. "Light!"

Following the direction of the Jap's extended finger, Chot saw a yellow streak, seemingly in the ground a few yards distant. Closer examination, how-

ever, revealed a huge wooden door leading into the hillside, and peering through the crack Chot saw a sight which amazed as well as delighted him.

Sitting on a stool in one end of the apartment, his hands bound behind him, was Bert Creighton, while nearby, reading by an ill-smelling oil lamp, was a man—apparently the only member of the smuggler band left on the island.

"Hoki, when you open the door, I'll rush in and cover him," said Chot.

"With greatest of pleasure," replied the little Jap, and seizing the huge door by a strap which hung outside, he gave a strong pull. The portal swung wide, and Chot, revolver in hand sprang through the opening into the smugglers' chamber.

"Hands up!" he cried, covering the smuggler before the latter could make a move toward his own weapon.

"Chot!" cried Bert, starting up. "Hurrah!"

"Cut Bert loose, Hoki," commanded Chot, still keeping his eye on the smuggler, who was so surprised he was for a moment speechless.

"What does this mean?" he cried out, at last.

"It means that the smugglers of the St. Lawrence are a thing of the past," Chot replied, as he grasped Bert's outstretched hand. "We have your pals, safe and sound. Are there any more of you?"

"Yes; lots of us," responded the man. "There's two of them behind you now."

Chot smiled, but did not turn.

"You can't fool me by that old ruse," he said.

"He lies, anyway," said Bert. "If you've got the four men who went to the lodge you've got them all. What are you going to do with this man?"

"Put him with the rest."

"But how?"

"I'll show you. Where's the speaking tube?"

Bert pointed it out, and calling up Tom, Chot informed him of the success of the trip to the north island, and asked him to send Pod over in his canoe for the prisoner.

"Tell him to head straight across for the island," he said.

Turning out the light in the chamber, and lighting a lantern for use on the shore, the boys went out, closing the door. With Hoki and Bert guarding the smuggler, Chot went back to where he had left Fleet's canoe, entered it, and paddled around to the other side of the island, just as he heard Pod calling out to know where to land.

Chot gave him directions to head for the light, and a few minutes later the smuggler, bound hand and foot, was bundled into Pod's canoe, and the little fellow was paddling back toward the lodge, while Bert, Chot and Hoki followed in Fleet's larger craft.

There was a scene of rejoicing at the lodge that night. The prisoners were

all securely bound, and the boys took turns in guarding them through the night.

Bert told his story before the boys retired. He had been aroused from his sleep in the hammock by strange noises in the lodge, and had cried out almost before he realized it. Then, believing that some of the mysteries that had puzzled them were about to be solved, he had run inside, motioning Chot and Tom to follow. The smugglers had evidently thought the boys all out of the lodge, for Bert surprised them, as well as himself, by dashing in among them. Then he had been taken captive and carried out through the tunnel, the trap-door dosed behind leaving no trace.

"Had you fellows looked out of the rear window you could have seen them carrying me across to the north island in their boats," said Bert.

"We were too busy speculating as to what had become of you," smiled Chot "I'm glad we have you safely back."

As Hoki was getting breakfast the following morning, the boys were startled to hear several blasts from a boat's siren, and looking out from the verandah of the lodge they saw a motor-boat about two-thirds of a mile distant, and headed straight for the island.

"It's Mr. Lawrence!" cried Chot. "Act as if nothing has happened, fellows, and we'll nab him, too!"

CHAPTER XXII—THE REVENUE OFFICERS

The motor-boat was a trim little craft, some forty feet in length, with a cabin forward, and an open deck aft, the latter covered with an awning and containing several chairs.

As she drew nearer Chot uttered an exclamation of astonishment, for plainly visible at the bow was a small brass swivel gun, evidently of the rapid fire variety.

"Mr. Lawrence is evidently prepared for war," said Fleet. "I didn't know they used such weapons on private yachts."

"That's no private yacht," said Chot, who was studying the boat intently; "see that American flag at the stern and the man in a blue uniform at the wheel.

That, fellows, is a government boat, probably in the revenue service. She is of a fine size to wind in and out among these islands."

"But what can she be wanting at Winnsocket Lodge?" asked Pod, perplexed.

"That I can't say, but, very likely, the officers are on the trail of the smugglers. They may have taken Mr. Lawrence captive, and are now on the lookout for the rest of the band."

"We'd better go meet them," said Tom. "That will show our good will."

"Yes; Pod, you go down and tell Bert to watch the prisoners while we are gone, and don't say anything before the smugglers about the officers being here."

Pod hurried away to do Chot's bidding, and Chot, Tom, Fleet and Truem went down to the little wharf toward which the motor-boat was heading.

The noise of her engines soon ceased, and describing a pretty circle, she came drifting up to the landing. Two men—one in the bow, the other in the stern—threw painters to the boys, who made them fast to posts on the wharf.

"Is this Winnsocket Lodge?" asked an officer, as he sprang ashore and eyed the boys keenly.

"Yes, sir," Chot responded.

"Do you live here?"

"No; we are a party of cadets from Winton Hall on the Hudson. We came up here in canoes, then remained as the guests of a Mr. Lawrence, who left the day after we arrived."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No, sir; he went away in the night in a motor-boat."

"I am Lieutenant Weston Winters of the United States revenue service," the officer went on, extending his hand. "We have been trying to trace to their hiding place a band of smugglers. We have every reason to believe that this Mr. Lawrence is the leader of the band. Have there been any unusual happenings since your arrival?"

"There has been nothing else," Chot replied, smiling. "As for the smugglers, we have captured the entire band with the exception of Mr. Lawrence, and we were getting ready to take him, too, believing at first that this was his boat."

Of course, Lieutenant Winters wanted the details, and Chot related their adventures from the moment they met Mr. Lawrence until the release of Bert Creighton from the smugglers' lair the previous night.

"And you have these men safe in the cellar?" asked Lieutenant Winters, a merry twinkle in his eyes.

"Yes, sir."

"Then I don't see much use of Uncle Sam keeping his officers in the St. Lawrence. You have done your country a noble service, boys, and one which will not be forgotten."

"We have simply tried to do our duty as citizens," returned Chot, earnestly.

"And you have more than succeeded. Now, let me see the captives."

The boys led the way to the lodge, Lieutenant Winters following with two of his men.

Down into the basement they went where Bert sat with a revolver, guarding the prisoners.

"H'm! A bunch of beauties," was Lieutenant Winter's comment. "There is 'Dandy Dick' Short, whom we have been wanting for some time, who was formerly a notorious smuggler on the gulf coast; and Larry Nexton, and Bill Gerry, and Flitty Gray, and, who's this—oh, yes, and Joe Silverton. Why, these are all old friends, boys—and old hands at the smuggling business. They have been trying to elude our clutches for a long time."

"And it looks like we succeeded pretty well," said Dandy Dick Short, the leader of the band. A sneer curled his lip. "It was left to a bunch of kids to catch us when we were not looking."

"Then all credit to the 'kids,' as you call them," said Lieutenant Winters, warmly. "The result has been accomplished, and I think I am safe in saying that you won't do any more smuggling for some years to come. How long have you been working for Lawrence?"

The men looked at each other, but said nothing.

"Don't want to squeal on him, eh? Oh, that's all right. I'm glad to see that there is still some honor among thieves. We'll get him, all right. He knows nothing of what's happened here, and when he returns he'll find a little surprise waiting for him."

Still the men said nothing.

"That's all right, boys, just hold your tongues." The lieutenant turned to Chot. "I'll leave my two men to take charge of these fellows. We're going to stay at the lodge until Lawrence returns."

"That suits us," said Chot. "We'll all wait, and if we boys can render any further assistance, just command us."

The two men from the revenue boat were placed as guards over the prisoners, thus relieving the boys of all responsibility in this regard.

Lieutenant Winters took up his abode at the lodge, sending the motor-boat around to the east end of the island, where, in a little cove, she was concealed from view from the north island, as well as the approaches from the west and south, by one of which routes Mr. Lawrence would be sure to come on his return to the island.

"Lawrence will no doubt come as he went, in the night," said Lieutenant Winters, "so we had best arrange a watch."

"He will probably enter by means of the secret passage," said Tom. "That is

the way he left, I am sure."

"In other words," said the lieutenant, "believing that you know nothing of the underground exit, he will probably seek to enter his room in the night and appear before you at the breakfast table as a complete surprise."

"That's the way he likes to do things, I should say, from what little opportunity I have had for observation," Tom replied.

"Does anyone know what Mr. Lawrence does in Boston?" asked Pod.

"I understand he is a diamond merchant," said Lieutenant Winters, "and that is one reason why we have been so anxious to catch him. The duty on precious stones is something enormous, and the government stands to lose considerable as long as such clever smugglers remain at liberty."

Chot took occasion to explain the assistance the Jap had rendered them, telling the officer how the Oriental had feared Mr. Lawrence, who had kept him at all times in a state of subjection and humility.

"I am sure the little Jap never did a wrong thing in his life," said Chot—"in fact, we found that he knew absolutely nothing about the smuggling, except that something mysterious was going on in the lodge. I doubt if he even understood what the word, 'smuggling' meant."

"Very likely you are right," replied the lieutenant, "and I assure you that I have no desire to place him in custody. I should like to have him where I can reach him, however, in case I need his testimony at the trial of the smugglers."

Hoki was delighted when informed that the officers had no designs on his peace and happiness. He declared his life-long devotion to the boys, and expressed an ardent desire to learn some American trade or business where he could always be near them. He had saved over a thousand dollars in his two years' service with Mr. Lawrence, he told them, the smuggler chief having been generous in his reward for Hoki's faithful work.

"Mr. Lawrence can't be all bad," said Fleet, "when he treats Hoki so well."

"At any rate," said Chot, "this has given me an idea regarding Hoki." After a moment's pause in which he was apparently thinking deeply, he said: "Hoki, how would you like to go to an American school?"

"It would give me greatest of pleasure, sirs, if my money is sufficiently large enough to accomplish such desires as you mention," replied Hoki.

"I believe a few years at Winton would make a good American out of you. You already read English do you not?"

"Yes; I read quite well, thank you, sirs."

"Then I believe we can induce Commandant Cullum to take you in."

"It will give me much joy, believe me, sirs," said the little Jap.

The prospect of being near the Comrades and their chums appealed to him more than anything else.

The boys resolved to take the Jap to Mortonville as their guest at the end of the canoe trip, from which place negotiations could be carried on with the commandant at Winton, looking to Hoki's entry into the school. He would be unable to pass a rigid examination, they knew, but in the case of foreigners exceptions had often been made in other schools, and they felt sure that Commandant Cullum would make it possible for the Jap to attend his institution.

A plan of action was agreed upon before any of the inmates of Winnsocket Lodge retired that night. If Mr. Lawrence cared to return to the lodge, he was to be allowed to enter and go secretly to his room. A man would then be stationed outside his door, and another in the yard outside, to guard against any tricks, and in the morning the leader would be informed of the capture of his band.

As the chief would probably enter the lodge through the basement, the smugglers were removed to one of the upper rooms of the lodge, that they might have no opportunity for disclosing their capture prematurely. Two men still remained on guard over them.

It was assumed that Mr. Lawrence would return in a motor-boat, as he had left, and Lieutenant Winters arranged that at a signal from him—a light placed in an upstairs window on the side where the government boat was moored—the "Lucia," as the government boat was named, was to go in pursuit of the boat which landed Mr. Lawrence, overhaul and capture her, returning thence to the island to take the prisoners to the New York shore.

Nothing occurred the first night, but shortly after midnight on the second the sound of a motor-boat was wafted over the water to Lieutenant Winters and Tom, who were doing guard duty. Every light had been extinguished, and from the rear window they waited for some sign that the smuggler chief was returning.

They had not long to wait, for the motor-boat came up to the shore of the island at a rapid pace. It was a perfect starlit night, and while the craft had no lights out, they could make out her dark outline against the water. There was some conversation which they were unable to catch, then the figure of a man sprang ashore and made for the mouth of the passage.

Lieutenant Winters called softly to one of his men to flash the signal to the "Lucia," and a moment later they heard the government boat move out of the cove and shoot around the end of the island in pursuit.

Tom ran quickly to his room and crawled in bed, and presently the lieutenant heard a soft, scraping sound in the basement, then light footfalls on the stairs. Mr. Lawrence made no attempt to strike a light, being thoroughly familiar with every foot of the lodge, and he tip-toed softly to the door of his room, entered and closed it with scarcely a sound.

"Ah!" breathed the revenue man. "The most important bird is caught at last."

Then he sat down outside the door of the smuggler chief to await the coming

of day.

CHAPTER XXIII—A SURPRISE FROM MR. LAWRENCE

When Mr. Lawrence entered the diningroom the following morning to greet his young guests, he was surprised to observe Lieutenant Winters and two men from the "Lucia" seated at his table. Hoki had prepared breakfast at Chot's request, and the boys were all instructed to act as if nothing unusual had occurred.

The boys greeted their host with a cordial "Good morning," as he entered the room, looking spick and span in a light duck suit. Then Chot arose. Lieutenant Winters and his men also got up.

"Mr. Lawrence," said Chot, "you left us in charge of Winnsocket Lodge, so when these gentlemen arrived yesterday in a boat, and signified their intention of awaiting your return, I invited them to partake of our hospitality. Was I right?"

"Perfectly," replied the smuggler chief. "Winnsocket Lodge has always been noted for its hospitality."

"This, then, is Lieutenant Winters of the United States revenue boat, 'Lucia'," Chot continued.

Both Mr. Lawrence and the lieutenant bowed.

"I have a few matters of importance to discuss with you, Mr. Lawrence," said the lieutenant.

"Pray, be seated," said the master of the lodge, in a courteous tone. "After breakfast I shall be most happy to talk to you."

There was nothing in his tone to indicate that he felt any uneasiness over the visit of the revenue men. On the contrary, he appeared to be in particularly jovial spirits, for he fell to laughing and chatting gaily.

Lieutenant Winters and the boys, not to be outdone entered into the spirit of the occasion, and the meal passed off pleasantly, Hoki serving in his best style and earning many golden opinions from his master and the others for his fine cooking.

The meal over, the entire party adjourned to the spacious living-room of the lodge, where, after offering the officer and his men some of the best of his cigars, Mr. Lawrence said:

"Lieutenant Winters, I should be blind, indeed, did I not divine your purpose in visiting Winnsocket Lodge."

"I have no desire, sir, to keep my purpose a secret."

"Well, before we settle the matter that lies between us, let me ask you if you have heard of Stanwood Gray?"

"Many times," returned the officer, rather surprised at the question. "I doubt if there is a man in the United States revenue or secret service who has not heard of him, though I dare say few have seen him."

"He is, then, a person of some note?"

"He is probably the most efficient man now in the service of the United States government," returned Lieutenant Winters.

"H'm, yes—I see. You will pardon me for seeming inquisitive, and particularly when you have come to question me, rather than allow me to question you, but are you not comparatively new to the service on the St. Lawrence?"

"Yes, sir; I have been here only a few months," replied the lieutenant.

"H'm, yes; transferred from the gulf service, I believe?"

"Why, yes, but I was not aware that such knowledge was in your possession."

"I know a great many things, Lieutenant Winters, that I am not credited with knowing. I know, for instance, that when you were transferred to this part of the country, you were given a letter to be delivered in person to Stanwood Gray, if you chanced to meet him."

"I—I—why, I beg your pardon, sir, but—"

The lieutenant paused in confusion.

What manner of man was this smuggler chief, who knew so many of the government secrets? No wonder he had been able to so long elude the officials.

Mr. Lawrence suddenly arose. The lieutenant got up just as quickly, and his hand flew instinctively to his belt, where it reposed lightly on the handle of his revolver.

Mr. Lawrence laughed.

"You will have no need for your weapon, lieutenant," he said, smiling. "I am not at all the dangerous man I may seem to you; and it may surprise you to learn that Lawrence is not my real name."

"That does not surprise me in the least, sir—in fact, I had already set it down as an alias."

"But what if I were to tell you that I am Stanwood Gray?"

"I would say to you, 'Prove it'."

"That, perhaps, can be done easier than you imagine. You were given a

secret code by which you might determine at any time the true identity of any man you suspected of being the secret service man. You might with profit, try that code on me."

The lieutenant seemed dazed. Could it be possible that Lawrence, the smuggler, was indeed none other than the famous Stanwood Gray? He would try the code and see.

Drawing himself erect, the lieutenant saluted three times in rapid succession. In response Mr. Lawrence saluted twice.

"Can you direct me to the gate?" inquired the lieutenant.

"The gate is four leagues from the south buoy," returned Mr. Lawrence, in language which, to the astonished boys, was unintelligible, but the meaning of which Lieutenant Winters seemed to fully appreciate.

"When was the wreck?" he asked.

"On May the 10th."

"Will you show me the buoy?"

"I will."

Without further ceremony Mr. Lawrence unbuttoned his vest, and took from an inside pocket what appeared to be a small vial. In this vial was a piece of paper, several inches in extent, but which had been rolled tightly to allow its passage through the neck of the little glass tube.

This paper Mr. Lawrence handed to Lieutenant Winters, who seized it and eagerly scanned its contents. It proved to be a certificate of identification, carried by secret service men, and shown only upon the most imperative occasions. The certificate was made out in the name of Mr. Stanwood Gray!

"I believe you now, Mr. Gray, but I wish to say that I have never been more completely surprised in my life," said Lieutenant Winters.

"Then you will readily appreciate the fact that I have to be in a position at all times to become a surprise, both to my friends and to those who are not my friends."

"I do appreciate that."

"And now," said Stanwood Gray, as he noticed the surprised looks on the faces of the Comrades and their chums, "a few words of explanation from me will not come amiss."

"You will pardon me a moment, I know, Mr. Gray," said the lieutenant, "but are you aware that the smugglers have been captured?"

"No; I was not aware of it. When did it occur?"

"Within the last two days, and it was encompassed by your guests, the boys, without further aid."

"Then if I have surprised you by revealing my true identity, you have, in turn, surprised me by this piece of good news. Boys, I congratulate you, and I

trust that you are not still wishing that I were a smuggler."

"No; it was one of the biggest disappointments we had ever known when suspicion was connected with you," said Chot.

"Well, perhaps you'd better let me tell my story."

They eagerly agreed, and he told how he had taken the lodge some two years before with the intention of breaking up a notorious band of smugglers. There had been at least a dozen in the band at that time, making their rendezvous on the north island.

Stanwood Gray had won their confidence and good will after much effort, by constructing the secret passage and explaining to them the advantages of getting goods across the line by such a method. He was finally looked upon as their leader. Gradually, then, the band had dwindled, as he had captured the smugglers one by one when away on his mysterious trips, carrying to the remainder of the band various stories concerning the death or disappearance of their comrades.

"You will wonder, no doubt, why I have allowed the band to remain in existence so long. It is because there are a number of prominent men behind the smuggling on whom I have never succeeded in collecting evidence. I am happy to say, however that now my proofs have about been completed, and within the next two weeks I expect to make some accusations that will cause a sensation in the newspapers."

The boys were allowed to question Mr. Gray at will. Hoki, they learned had never suspected his true identity. When told that they were arranging to send the Jap to Winton, Mr. Gray expressed his pleasure and said that he would have been forced soon to dispense with his services.

"What I fail to understand, Mr. Gray," said Lieutenant Winters, "is how you managed to get away with the spoils and return the smugglers enough money to keep them satisfied."

"Money to satisfy the smugglers was often taken from a reserve fund which is kept for such purposes, while the smuggled goods were delivered to parties in the states, minus the duty. In order that this arrangement should not become known to the smugglers, I was forced each time to dispose of the goods to different parties."

"And the motor-boat which you are using—that is in your private service, I suppose?"

"Yes. And that reminds me that I should send for the boat, as I shall be forced to leave the island at once."

"I will save you the trouble of sending for it," said Lieutenant Winters, with a smile. "When you landed I flashed a signal to the captain of the 'Lucia' and he overhauled your craft. She is now lying alongside the government launch in the cove on the east end of the island."

"Your plan was very well carried out, and does you great credit. The proper authorities shall know of your good service," said Stanwood Gray.

"Thank you, sir," responded the lieutenant, greatly pleased.

"And as for the boys who have been my guests," said Mr. Gray, "they, also, shall be remembered in a very substantial manner."

"We have often wondered why you ever took us in at all," said Chot.

"Because affairs were approaching a crisis in my case against the smugglers, and I felt that upon my return from this trip I might need your service—and then, as I explained before, I am very fond of boys."

Mr. Gray decided not to see or speak to the captured smugglers.

"Let them still think of me as Mr. Lawrence, and that I have been captured and taken away," he said, and Lieutenant Winters agreed.

Stanwood Gray left the lodge again that night, leaving the boys in full charge. Following, shortly, went Lieutenant Winters in the "Lucia," with the smuggler captives.

"I don't know when I shall return," said Mr. Gray, just before his departure, "but until I do the lodge is in your care. If you run short of provisions, Hoki knows where to get more, and you can have them charged to me. Should you be forced to leave before I get back, lock the lodge, leave the key at this address, and send me a wire at this one. It will be forwarded to me wherever I may be. Now, enjoy yourselves, and be comforted by the thought that you will be disturbed no more by midnight prowlers—at least, none of the smuggler variety."

CHAPTER XXIV—IN MORTONVILLE AGAIN

The next few days were ones of great enjoyment for the young canoeists. Their fondest dreams of life among the Thousand Islands were realized; for bathing, boating, fishing, and occasionally some scrub games of baseball, with access to the really fine library of the lodge, served to occupy their time.

Hoki still acted in the capacity of cook, preferring to serve the boys in this way as long as they should remain at the lodge. The matter of Mr. Gray's double

identity had been explained to the Jap, and he had at last reversed his opinion of his former master; he now stood in fear of him no longer. Mr. Gray's deception of Hoki had only been a part of his well-devised plan to lose his real identity completely.

One day in the early part of August Stanwood Gray arrived in his motor-boat, his face wreathed in smiles. He had succeeded in winding up the case of the smugglers, he said, and the matter was now at rest until their trial came up at the fall term of court.

"I am going to put in three weeks of solid rest," he said, "before going to another part of the country to look into an affair of an entirely different nature. I have been a long time on the case of the smugglers, but the final result entirely justified my judgment in the matter. You boys were of great assistance, and I am glad to be able to present you each with a little token of the government's appreciation."

He handed each of the boys a personal letter from the chief of the United States secret service, thanking them warmly for the part they had played in the breaking up of the smugglers. To say the boys were delighted would be expressing it mildly indeed.

A few days after Mr. Gray's arrival the boys took their leave, camping one night on the island to the south, and sleeping in the open, then paddling on to the New York shore.

At Clayton they took a train for their homes, Bert Creighton going back to Lake George, the Comrades to Mortonville, and Truem and Pod to Bayville, where they would spend the few remaining days of their vacation. Hoki, of course went with the Comrades. All of the boys looked eagerly forward to another meeting at Winton in September.

This was the first time the Comrades had seen their folks since going to Stockdale Preparatory School the previous fall, and the welcome given them, not only by relatives, but friends, as well, was a royal one. Hoki's reception was also a warm one, and during his stay he was considerable of a curiosity to the villagers.

Tom's mother, since the death of his father, was living at the house of a relative, and here Tom took his meals, making his headquarters at other times in the old home where he had an attic fitted up in a similar fashion to those of Chot and Fleet. The house had been rented by one of Mr. Duncan's employes, who generously accorded Tom full privilege to do as he pleased. The attic had remained practically undisturbed, and Tom found great pleasure in rummaging among his books and mechanical contrivances.

The Comrades' trunks had been sent home before they left Winton, together with Tom's phonograph and Chot's miniature windmill, on both of which inventions the boys expected to eventually realize great returns. Considerable re-

mained on each to put them in shape for a first class marketable commodity, and during the days they were idling away their time they undertook to perfect them.

Tom was working faithfully one day when the private telephone which connected his attic with those of Chot and Fleet, rang loudly.

"Hello!" cried Tom, taking down the receiver.

"This is Chot."

"Oh, hello, Chot!"

"Hello! Hello!" Fleet broke in at this instant.

"Hello, yourself," returned Chot. "Listen fellows, I want you to come over here immediately. I want your advice on something of great importance."

"Look for us," said both Tom and Fleet, and hanging up their receivers, both boys hurried in the direction of the Duncan home.

"What is it?" cried Fleet, out of breath, he being the first to arrive.

"Curb your impatience till Tom gets here," Chot replied.

Tom arrived about a minute after Fleet, his face plainly expressing his curiosity.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"That's what I want to find out," said Chot. "I have just received a letter from Luther Pendleton."

"Well, what does he want this time?" growled Tom.

"More money, of course. Listen to what he says:

"'Dear Chot:

> No doubt you will be surprised to hear from me after this long silence, but I assure you that the reason I have not written is because I have had no good news for you regarding the mine. The money you advanced me at Stockdale was not sufficient to accomplish the result we desired, and unless more funds can be raised for the same purpose, I can do nothing. I dislike to ask another favor, but you will understand the situation thoroughly. I haven't been able to interest capital in the proposition, as yet, but I still have great hopes if I can have funds to carry out my plans. It will take another thousand dollars at least—perhaps more—but I will try and make out with that sum.
>
> Trusting you will give this your immediate attention, I am your friend, etc!'

"Now what do you think of that, fellows?"

"I think what I've always thought," said Tom. "Luther Pendleton is a rascal, and he's going to get his just deserts some of these fine days."

"Admitting that to be true," said Chot, "the most important question is,

should we let go of the proposition entirely, and figure that the money already given Pendleton is just so much lost, or shall we trust him a little farther, and if he still fails, take other means of looking after our interests in the property?"

"I should be in favor," said Tom, "of letting it go by the board."

"Of course, I haven't the thousand dollars," said Chot, "and the only way I should be willing to take hold of the matter again would be to first explain to my father what the other money was used for, and ask his advice in the matter."

"I think that's a good plan," said Fleet, "and I will further suggest that we talk the matter over with my father, also; I believe he might advance me the money to get in on the deal."

"Well, of course," said Tom, "I am in only through the kindness of Chot and his father. I own a fifth share, but it has not cost me one cent, except that I have obligated myself to pay for it, as well as for the money Mr. Duncan is advancing to send me to Winton, after I leave school and branch out into business for myself."

"Your invention will realize more than enough to pay your debts," said Chot, "so there's no need to worry over that. However, I should hate to go farther into this proposition without your consent, Tom."

"Oh, I'll agree to anything you think best after you have talked the matter with your fathers," said Tom.

It was decided to lay the matter before Mr. Duncan and Mr. Kenby that night, and the boys immediately arranged for a conference. Mr. Duncan had often wondered, he said, what Chot had done with the money asked for so mysteriously while at Winton, but had never sought to question him, knowing that Chot would tell him in good time.

The conference was held in Chot's attic room, and the matter of the mine laid before Mr. Duncan and Mr. Kenby in detail. Chot told of Luther Pendleton's visit to Stockdale, how he had sent for him and made the proposition, and how for Lucy's sake, more than anything else, Chot had wired Mr. Duncan for the money.

"You and Tom, then, own a fifth share each?" Mr. Duncan asked.

"Yes, and another fifth is held by Lucy. Pendleton kept two-fifths as his share for working the proposition."

"Well there's nothing unfair about that, but if matters ever came to a crisis, it would depend on Lucy entirely as to which way the stock would go. Do you understand what I mean? If Lucy leaned toward her father he would have the controlling interest. If she leaned toward you, the advantage would be on your side."

The boys nodded to signify that they understood.

"Pendleton is a shrewd fellow," said Mr. Kenby, "and while we may not like him personally, I do not believe he would bother with a mining proposition at all if he did not see money in it."

"That's true," said Mr. Duncan. "Like yourself I have some confidence in the actual value of the property. What I am afraid of is that Pendleton is seeking a way to eventually crowd the boys out of the proposition altogether. There is only one way to remedy such a thing—that is through a controlling interest in the mine, and that the boys have not got."

"Then let me suggest that we induce Lucy to part with her share to Fleet," said Mr. Kenby. "That will give the boys a three-fifths interest, and will overcome the difficulty you mention."

"A good idea," said Mr. Duncan. "Chot shall write to Lucy at once. She is in Stockdale with her aunt—or, at least, she said that was where she was going when she left here a few weeks since."

"I'll write to her to-night," said Chot, which called forth a wink from Fleet. Chot understood the wink but paid no attention to it, and Fleet subsided.

"Be careful how you word the letter," said Mr. Duncan. "It is a delicate subject for her, and there is no use to offend her or prejudice her against her father."

"Leave that to me," said Chot. "I had a perfect understanding with her at the time the papers were signed. She loves her father, I think, but knows he does not always deal squarely."

"An awful position for a girl to be in," said Mr. Kenby, with a grave shake of the head. "It's lucky that Lucy has an aunt to stay with."

"It is," said Chot. "Mrs. Dashworth does not like Mr. Pendleton, and will always look after Lucy's welfare."

"Well, if she does not, there are others who will," said Chot's father, in a grim tone that sent a thrill through each of the boys.

"I'll tell you, fellows," said Chot, when Mr. Duncan and Mr. Kenby had gone down into the library for a smoke before retiring, "this mine is going to cause us trouble. I can feel it in die air. That is, unless we relinquish all claim to it, and that I'm sure none of us are inclined to do."

"No; not in the face of facts made clear to-night," said Tom. "Something has always told me that Luther Pendleton was a rascal of the first water. I cannot say what has made me believe this—instinct, perhaps—but ever since that day at the brass works, after my father died, when he told me of the obligation we would have to pay, I have mistrusted him."

"Pendleton may know more of your father's accounts than he cares to admit," said Fleet.

"I have often thought that, and am waiting such a time as I can confront him with something substantial in the way of proof to that effect," said Tom.

"It has always seemed to me," said Chot, "that Luther Pendleton was not the sort of man to be the father of a fine girl like Lucy. I heartily wish he was not her

father, for you must realize that regard for her would hold us back in this matter, when otherwise we would be inclined to see Pendleton severely punished."

"It is for Lucy's sake that I have never quite expressed my sentiments with regard to her father," said Tom.

The boys finally separated for the night, Fleet going home with his father, and Tom to his attic den where he had a comfortable bed.

Chot sat up late, writing first to Commandant Cullum about Hoki, and then to Lucy. He went into considerable detail in the latter, asking Lucy if she would transfer the stock to Fleet for a sum to be agreed upon.

He mailed the letters in the morning.

CHAPTER XXV—CONCLUSION

For the next few days Fleet kept away from his chums for the greater part of the time, and when they pressed him to know how he was occupying his time, he merely winked, and said:

"Wait and see."

Hour after hour he spent in his den, the door locked, and the only way they could communicate with him at such a time was by means of a telephone, and then his answers were sometimes short.

"I'm awfully busy," he said one day to Chot, when his chum rang him up and asked him to go swimming in the creek. "Sorry, but I'll have to ring off."

And that was all Chot could get out of him. So he and Tom and Hoki went off to the creek together, speculating on what Fleet was doing, but not reaching any satisfactory conclusion.

"It may be an invention of some sort," said Tom.

"No; I believe not," said Chot. "Fleet is not of an inventive turn of mind. He's a good electrician and a good general mechanic, but when it comes to originating ideas along these lines, he has never displayed any talent."

"That's right," Tom replied. "Well, I suppose he will tell us about it in due time."

At last one day Fleet came out of his den, his face wreathed in smiles, and when he went to the post office he carried a package of considerable size, which he stamped and mailed.

Then he joined in the activities with the other boys. Excursions to the woods, canoeing on the creek, with daily swims in the cool waters, served to make the time pass quickly.

Hoki was initiated into the mysteries of an athletic life. He already knew considerable of his own jiu-jitsu, and he, in turn, taught the boys considerable of this, and much of their time was spent in becoming perfect in it, as its many advantages were manifest.

Learned in connection with scientific boxing, it would prove formidable against any sort of an antagonist, they felt.

Hoki was a continual source of delight to them, his quaint manners and methods of speech causing them to laugh uproariously on all occasions. This the little Jap took good naturedly. It did not discourage him in the least. He was determined to learn thoroughly American ways and customs, and in exchange for the knowledge given him by the boys, told them many wonderful things about the land of the Mikado.

One afternoon a little incident occurred that proved beyond any doubt the Jap's loyalty to the Comrades.

Hoki had been down to the post office on an errand for Chot and Tom and was returning when he was accosted by several of the village boys, led by a young bully, named Carter Dane. Carter had never liked the Comrades, and insisted that since they had been away a year to school they were "stuck up," and did not care for the company of their former associates.

"Watch me have some fun with this Jap," he remarked, a sneer curling his lip, as he saw Hoki approaching along the road.

The little Jap was moving at a good pace, despite the hotness of the afternoon, and was right upon the boys, who were sitting on a fence in the shade, before he saw them. Then, to show his good will, he grinned and bowed.

"What do you mean by speaking to your betters?" cried Carter Dane, as he confronted the Jap.

He towered at least a head over Hoki, and was built after a stocky fashion, with plenty of muscle and strength from a life lived mostly in the open air.

"No understand," said Hoki, pausing and backing away a little, as if in doubt as to Carter's purpose.

"No, I guess you don't understand," continued the bully. "No Jap ever understands anything worth understanding. I don't know why those fellows ever brought you to Mortonville, but I do know one thing—you can't speak to every boy you meet in the village."

Hoki said nothing, unable to fathom Carter's motive for talking thus. He could not see where one whom he had never harmed could have a motive for wishing to do him injury.

"So you're afraid, eh?" demanded the bully. "I thought so. You get that from Chot Duncan and his crowd."

"Chot Duncan all right!" said Hoki. His face was expressionless, but his little black eyes fairly snapped fire as he glared at his antagonist.

"Oh, he is, is he?" said Carter, advancing toward him. "I think I'd better teach you a lesson. You can't talk impudently to your betters. Don't you know that?"

"You're not my better," said the Jap boy, and as he spoke he straightened up and waited for Carter to approach.

Then, as the bully struck out straight from the shoulder, intending to lay Hoki out with one blow, something surprising happened. The Jap sidestepped, linked his arm around the bully's neck, and sent him hurtling over his shoulder into the roadway, where he lay, white and still.

"You've killed him!" cried one of the other boys.

"No, kill," said Jap, grimly. "Could kill, but don't want to kill—this time. Tell him it my pleasure is that he avoid me in future."

And with that Hoki started on up the road.

"Here, here," cried one of the boys; "you can't go yet. Wait till we find how badly he's hurt."

"He only stunned," Hoki replied. "Should you wish me, it would me great pleasure give to entertain you at the mansion of Mr. Duncan."

Then Hoki went on, while the boys assisted Carter Dane to his feet. Carter and the other boys started immediately for the Duncan residence, bent on vengeance, followed by several villagers who had seen the affair.

By the time they arrived, Hoki had told his story, and Chot, Tom and Fleet, with the Jap, were out in the yard, ready to receive them.

"Chot Duncan, you've got to give us that Jap," said Carter Dane.

"What do you want with the Jap?" Chot calmly asked.

"He played me a dirty trick down there, and we're going to beat him."

"What about the trick you played him, Dane?"

"I played him no trick."

"He says you stopped him in the road and threatened him, telling him not to talk to his betters, and from what I know of your reputation, I'm inclined to believe him."

"Of course you'll take his word before mine, but these boys saw the affair."

Several of the boys nodded, but they did not seem at all anxious to confirm Dane's statements.

"I saw it, too," said one of the villagers, "and the Jap was in no way to blame. Dane confronted him and made him fight, and then got mad because the Jap threw him over his shoulder into the road. The Jap's got pluck and I admire him for it."

"That's right," said several of the others.

"Now, listen to me, Dane," said Chot. "Hoki is under our protection. I brought him to Mortonville as my guest. When you insult him you insult me. I want you to beg his pardon right now, or you'll have me to settle with."

"I won't!"

"Very well." Chot rolled up his sleeves and leaped quickly over the fence into the road. "You and I had it once before, about two years ago, Dane, and you know what happened. Will you beg his pardon?"

"Aw, I don't want to fight you," growled the bully. "I didn't mean anything. It was only a joke as far as I was concerned."

"Then let's call it a joke. It reacted on you, that's all. Do you beg his pardon?"

"Yes; I beg his pardon."

"All right. The next time I bring anyone to Mortonville as my guest, you either be civil to him or leave him alone. Understand?"

But Carter Dane's only response was a growl, as he slunk off down the road.

Hoki rose even in the estimation of the Comrades by his thrashing of the bully, and when a letter arrived the following day from Commandant Cullum, telling them that he would be glad to receive the Jap at Winton, and overlook some deficiencies in his education, everyone was delighted, Hoki most of all.

The same mail brought a letter from Lucy. It was a big official-looking envelope, and when Chot opened it, he saw besides the letter the certificate of stock. The letter read, in part, as follows:

> "Dear Chot:
>
> "I am sending the mining stock as you request. Do as you wish with it. As I told you before, the matter is entirely in your hands. I know that whatever you do will be right. Have been staying with my aunt since leaving Mortonville. Hope to see you again before the fall term of school opens. I shall be at Professor Pinchum's Academy as usual."

There were several other things in the letter which Chot did not read aloud to Tom and Fleet. But he saw the wink that passed between them, and seizing a couple of the sofa pillows from a couch in his den, sent them hurtling at the heads of his chums.

The certificate was shown to Mr. Duncan and Mr. Kenby, a check was made out for one thousand dollars in favor of Lucy, and another in favor of Luther

Pendleton. In case the mine never amounted to anything, Lucy would have her thousand. Mr. Kenby insisted on this, and the boys knew that his generous heart was overflowing with kindness toward the girl who had been placed in such an unfortunate position.

"Someday we shall perhaps be able to do more for her," said he.

"If the mine pans out, you three boys and Lucy shall divide your three-fifths share among you, and something seems to tell me that Pendleton is not fooling his time away out there for nothing," said Mr. Duncan.

So with that the matter was allowed to rest, and the time was now approaching when the boys would go back to Winton. They could not foresee the incidents to be recorded in "Winton Hall Cadets," the next book of this series, and went enthusiastically about the preparations for their leave taking.

The opening date for the fall term was September 7, and three days before they left they received a letter from Pod, another from Truem Wright, and still another from Bert Creighton, telling the days they were starting for school. The day before leaving letters came from Wilkes Davis, Randy Denton and Dan Kirlicks, with the information that they, too, were leaving at once for Winton.

"Looks like it's going to be a grand reunion," said Fleet, "and I'll bet you fellows won't jolly me any more about not being a poet."

As he spoke he held up triumphantly a letter he had just received from a New York publishing house. Then the truth of Fleet's secret work in his den dawned upon Chot and Tom.

"They accepted the manuscript I sent them, and will use one of my nature poems," Fleet continued. "Now congratulate me, you lobsters, and I'll forgive what you said to me on the trip that night."

Of course they congratulated him. They had known all along that he was destined to make his mark and if their criticism had been at times severe, they felt that it was now bearing results, though, of course, they did not tell Fleet that.

THE END.

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK COMRADES ON RIVER AND LAKE ***

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